

## Canada, PNA near free trade deal

OTTAWA (R) — Canada and the Palestinian National Authority may sign a free trade deal as early as next month, which some Palestinians hope will give them a political and commercial boost. Any deal would be a long-sought extension to a free-trade agreement between Canada and Israel that came into force in 1997, Canadian officials said on Wednesday. A spokesman at Canada's Trade Department said the two sides hope to reach a deal before the end of February, so that Canada's International Trade Minister Sergio Marchi can sign the agreement during his trip to the Middle East, scheduled for Feb. 22-28. "We're hoping, if we can have something done, it would be nice to have the minister sign something if we can finish at that point. So discussions are ongoing," trade spokesman Andre Lemay told Reuters. The deal would cover the West Bank and Gaza, areas under the administrative control of the Palestinian Authority.

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## Turk ministry bans forced virginity tests

ISTANBUL (R) — Turkey's justice ministry said on Wednesday it had issued a decree to the country's prosecutors banning the much-maligned practice of forced virginity testing on women. Several teenage girls commit suicide each year after being subjected to the examination to check if their hymen is intact. The practice is especially prevalent in state-run school dormitories in rural areas of Turkey, where sex before marriage is frowned upon. "One must not examine people and then punish them in a way that will offend their feelings of shame or modesty," the ministry said in the decree, a copy of which was faxed to Reuters. Turkey's outgoing minister for women and family affairs caused an uproar among feminists and rights groups last year when she spoke out in favour of the tests.

## Mouse plunges Swiss red light district into darkness

COIRE (AFP) — The red light district of a major Swiss city was plunged into darkness when a mouse sparked an electrical short-circuit, a local electricity official said Wednesday. The rodent slipped on an electrical transformer, cutting off light to around 3,000 people overnight Tuesday in Coire, a city of 330,000 inhabitants in eastern Switzerland. "As it was the red light district, they didn't have much need for electricity," said Kurt Schiess, director of the canton of Giron's electricity company. The mouse did not survive the incident.

## Heatwave hits Swiss mountains

ZURICH (AFP) — The Swiss Alps Wednesday basked in summer heat, recording the highest temperatures since records began 62 years ago, the national weather service said. At Jungfraujoch, the highest Swiss weather station at 3,580 metres, the temperature hit 3.3 degrees, or three degrees above the previous record set in January 1982, Meteo News said. The thermometer registered 10 degrees Celsius at 2,000 metres while the zero degree mark was attained only at 4,000 metres. These readings are normally found in summer, said Meteo News, explaining that they were due to a band of high pressure over Switzerland and the influence of a mass of sub-tropical air. The freak warm spell is set to end Thursday with the return of winter temperatures to Switzerland.

## Egyptian singer arrested over gambling charges

CAIRO (AFP) — Popular Egyptian singer Sharif Fadel was detained for questioning Wednesday, along with her husband and nine people, for running her home into an illegal gambling house, police sources said. An Iraqi businessman and four Egyptians, including a tax collector, were among the gamblers rounded up by police acting on a tip-off who raided Fadel's home, they said. Gamblers had to pay some \$180 up front in order to play at the Fadel casino, police sources said. Gambling is prohibited in Egypt except for foreigners, who can play only in some five-star hotel casinos. Fadel, 61, was a big star as both singer and actress from the 1950s until the mid-70s. She is perhaps best known for her song "Hero's Mother," dedicated to her son killed on the battlefield in the 1973 war with Israel.

# Jordan, Egypt, PNA plan meeting on peace process

Agencies

JORDAN, EGYPT and the Palestinian National Authority will hold a high-level meeting later this month to discuss developments in the peace process, Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khattab said Wednesday.

"A meeting of the foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority will take place around Jan. 20," he said.

The Palestinian Authority will send Yasser Arafat's number two man, Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen.

Officials said the meeting will probably be held in Amman.

The session's goal is "to coordinate positions on the Arab-Israeli peace process and the frozen Palestinian-Israeli Wye River accord" concluded in October, Khattab said.

In Gaza City, Planning Minister Nabil Shaath said on Wednesday that the PNA hoped to revive a Franco-

Egyptian plan for an international conference to kickstart the floundering peace process with Israel.

Planning Minister Nabil Shaath told AFP that, during a recent visit to Cairo, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat had asked Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to put the idea put back on the table.

"During our last visit to Cairo we asked Mr. Mubarak to reactivate the Franco-Egyptian initiative," Shaath said.

In May 1998, Mubarak and French President Jacques Chirac proposed an international conference "committed to saving peace" in the Middle East in the face of the perceived intransigence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

But, until now, the idea had seemed to have died a quiet death as the deadline of May 4 approached, the date on which the Palestinians have said they will announce an independent state.

Shaath said that the official Palestinian line on the

announcement of a state on May 4 "had not changed."

"We cannot let the date pass without affirming the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state," he said.

Arafat is due to launch a fresh diplomatic initiative after the Eid Al Fitr feast which marks the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and which falls this year on or around Jan. 19, according to Shaath.

"Mr. Arafat will make intensive political and diplomatic efforts during visits to Germany, Switzerland and the United States," he said.

Meanwhile in Bonn, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and his Israeli counterpart, Ariel Sharon, called for the full implementation of the stalled West Bank peace accords after meeting on Wednesday.

Sharon also called on the European Union to help Israel achieve security in the Middle East.

Fischer met Sharon in his capacity as spokesperson for EU foreign policy, which he assumed when Germany took on the six-month rotating presidency of the European Union on Jan. 1.

Fischer said he hoped Israelis and Palestinians would cease unilateral action in their conflict, apparently sidestepping the question of whether he supported a Palestinian plan to declare an independent state in May.

The leaders agreed only consensus could bring progress in the Wye accords, which were shelved over Israeli demands that Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Authority collect illegal weapons, reduce its police force, curb incitements to violence and renounce intentions to establish a Palestinian state.

The Palestinians, with support from the U.S. President Bill Clinton, rejected the demands as new conditions that were not part of the agreement reached at the Wye River Conference Centre in Maryland.

## Japanese FM to visit Saturday

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Kōmura is expected here on Saturday for high-level talks on the Middle East peace process and bilateral relations, officials and diplomats said.

A Japanese embassy spokesman told the Jordan Times that Kōmura is scheduled to meet with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh and Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khattab.

"He will also hold talks on bilateral cooperation with the government's economic team," the spokesman said.

Kōmura's two-day visit comes as part of a week-long trip to the region which started on Wednesday and will take him to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Kōmura was quoted by Reuters news agency on Tuesday as saying that Japan is well placed to make a strong appeal for progress in the Middle East peace process because it has good relationships with all sides.

Kōmura said Japan also had the advantage of being able to offer financial aid to countries in the region.

"Japan has done nothing to make the Palestinians resent it, and it has not done anything wrong to Israel either. So we are on good terms with both... and Japan has friendly relations with the countries involved," he said.

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Israeli soldiers enforcing a three-day curfew in the Israeli-controlled sector of the Palestinian town of Hebron and Palestinians shopping on the very edge of the Palestinian-controlled sector watch each other as tensions run high hours after a Palestinian man was fatally shot by Israeli troops on Wednesday (Reuters photo)

## Palestinian brandishing toy gun killed by Israeli soldiers

HEBRON (AP) — Israeli soldiers on Wednesday shot and killed a Palestinian after he brandished what turned out to be a toy pistol. The victim's family said he was returned.

At the time of the incident, soldiers were enforcing a curfew that barred all Palestinian residents of downtown Hebron from leaving their homes.

The army said the soldiers were guarding the Jewish settler enclave of Beit Romano in downtown Hebron when a Palestinian, later identified as 20-year-old Bader Kawasmeh, approached them.

Soldiers asked Kawasmeh to stop for a security check. The army statement said, Kawasmeh took out a pistol and fled, with soldiers in pursuit.

At one point during the chase, Kawasmeh changed direction and ran toward the soldiers, the army said, but offered no explanation why he would suddenly head toward his pursuers. Soldiers opened fire, critically wounding him, the army said.

The army said the gun in Kawasmeh's possession was a toy. Kawasmeh was treated by army paramedics and taken to a hospital by military ambulance. He died several hours later at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem.

"They killed my son in cold blood," said Kawasmeh's father, Haidar, who owns a garage where his son worked occasionally.

Kawasmeh said his son was mentally retarded. The shoot-

ing occurred shortly before 9 a.m. (1070 GMT) in the central square of Hebron, near the outdoor vegetable market.

Hebron, home to 130,000 Palestinians and 450 Jewish settlers, is one of the tensest spots in the West Bank, and there is frequent friction between the two groups. On Monday, assailants believed to be Palestinian activists opened fire on a van carrying settler women and two of the passengers were injured.

In response, the Israeli army imposed a curfew on the downtown area of the city it controls and also placed a siege on Hebron, barring Palestinians from leaving and entering the city.

Settlers can move around freely.

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## As it celebrates Army Day, Iraq claims victory in the skies

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq celebrated Army Day on Wednesday by declaring victory after a dogfight with U.S. warplanes amid reports that U.N. weapons inspectors were spying on Iraq in an effort to topple President Saddam Hussein.

But after Saddam's fiery speech Tuesday, in which he called on Arabs to revolt against their leaders and vowed to continue defying U.S. enforcement of the "no-fly" zones, there were no

reports of further clashes in the skies.

"Iraq emerged victorious from this confrontation," the official Al Jumhuriya newspaper said referring to a dogfight between U.S. and Iraqi planes Tuesday in the two nations' first aerial duel in six years.

The Al Thawra paper of the ruling Baath party said Iraqi pilots "showed a courage which forced the American and British air forces to withdraw from Iraqi airspace."

"Our heroic eagles have again proved their courage and their ability to defend the unity of Iraq and the sovereignty of its territory and its airspace."

Iraqi Defence Minister General Sultan Hashem Ahmad warned: "We are determined to defend our right to fly our planes above Iraq."

In his speech — which was not broadcast in Iraq until Wednesday morning — Saddam swore "by God" to keep

up his defiance of the United States and Britain, which pounded Iraq with four days of air strikes in mid-December.

Saddam also called for uprisings against Arab leaders who supported the strikes.

"Your sacred places are being insulted. The enemy's warplanes and missiles have been and are still launched against our land, people and sacred places in Iraq from the waters, airspace and territories of the Gulf," he said.

"He who lacks the basic conditions of supreme responsibility has to step down... Rather he has to be kicked down or fought out of office with swords," the president said.

"Launch your attacks against treacherous traitors who have betrayed you and disgraced your countries and the greater Arab World after they ignored your opinion and sought to implement the wishes and the will of foreign powers."

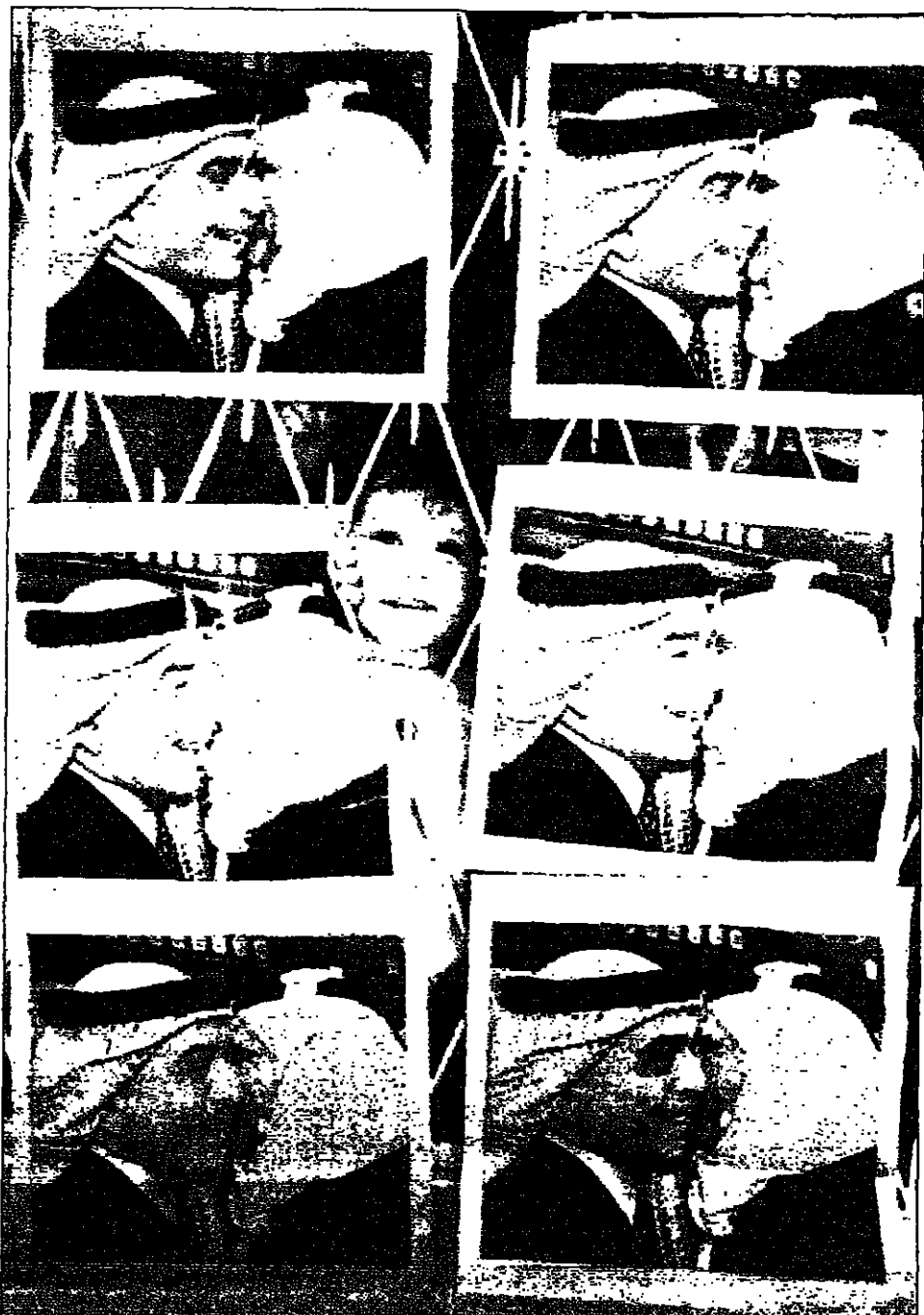
The U.S. State Department said the unusual speech was evidence that Saddam's standing in the Arab World was fast collapsing.

"The intemperate, unmeasured and desperate tone I think speaks very clearly to the isolation that Iraq faces in the Arab World, and the isolation that Saddam Hussein faces around the entire world," spokesman James Rubin said.

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## Israel to expel three more cult members

PETAH TIKVA (AFP) — Israeli authorities issued deportation orders Wednesday against three more members of a U.S. apocalyptic Christian sect suspected of planning attacks in Jerusalem to hasten the second coming of Jesus, officials said. The interior ministry on Monday already ordered the deportation of five other members of the Denver-based group Concerned Christians and six of their children. Police sources said deportation of the 14 could occur later Wednesday. A Petah Tikva court on Monday ordered three of the suspects to be held in custody for further questioning but on Wednesday the order was issued to deport them as well, police spokeswoman Linda Menuhin said. The three were identified as John Bayles, Terry Smith and Eric Malesic, all from the Denver area in Colorado. Police detained the eight adults and six children in two Jerusalem suburbs on Sunday after tracking the group since their arrival in Israel in September.



Children on Wednesday look from a window decorated with pictures of His Majesty King Hussein embracing HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent (Reuters photo)

## King Hussein arrives in London

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein arrived in London last night for rest on his way back home, Jordan's Ambassador to the U.K. Fuad Ayyoub said Wednesday.

Officials have said the King is expected to stay around two weeks in London before heading for Amman.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the

Regent, has told Jordanians in a televised address recently that King Hussein has fully recovered from illness.

The King was hospitalized since last July for treatment of lymph glands cancer at the Mayo Clinic. After undergoing six sessions of chemotherapy, King Hussein was declared free of cancer but was given a transplant from his own bone marrow as a precaution.

Preparations for nationwide celebrations of the King's homecoming started in earnest and each ministry had been preparing its own programme for the event. Meanwhile, King Hussein yesterday received a cable from Saudi Arabia's Tobouk emir, Prince Fahad Ben Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz, expressing happiness for the King's recovery and homecoming soon.

## Israel destroyed 147 Palestinian homes in '98

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The Israeli army destroyed 147 Palestinian homes last year under its policy of demolishing structures built without Israeli authorisation in the occupied territories, a U.S.-based human-rights group reported Wednesday.

"This is a collective punishment that allows Israel to carry out a policy of modifying the demographic and geographic facts on the ground in its favour," the group, Solidarity International, said in its report.

A count carried out by the group found that during 1998 the Israeli army and police destroyed 45 houses in Arab east Jerusalem, 40 around Hebron, 16 near Ramallah, 13

in the Nablus area, 11 around Bethlehem, 10 by Jenin, six near Qalqilya, four near Jericho and two in the Gaza Strip.

The group gave no comparative figures for the number of homes destroyed by Israel in previous years but its representative in the West Bank, Ahmad Abu Shalal, told AFP "last year was a bad year for demolitions and next year is going to be worse."

According to the independent Palestinian committee on land and environment, Israel has destroyed nearly 700 Palestinian houses since the signing of the 1993 Oslo accords. About 2,000 other houses have been targeted for demolition, it said.

## Shahak launches election bid

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Denouncing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as "dangerous for Israel," former army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak declared his candidacy Wednesday for the premiership in May elections.

"Netanyahu must leave," Lipkin-Shahak, 54, said during a press conference called to launch his candidacy for prime minister and a new centrist political movement to run in elections for parliament.

"Now that I have taken off my uniform, I am enlisting again as a citizen to defend the state of Israel against threats from within and without," said Lipkin-Shahak, a highly decorated general who retired from the military only last week.

"Netanyahu is dangerous for Israel," Lipkin-Shahak continued.

A political novice but with experience as a negotiator with the Palestinians and Syria, Lipkin-Shahak is credited in opinion polls with an outside chance of toppling Netanyahu.

(Continued on page 12)







## The Prophet broke the fast with dates and milk Have we forgotten the lesson of Ramadan?

Some of us end up in hospital from Ramadan overeating — for others, mere dates would be a luxury, writes Susan Resheq.

non-Ramadan days, between 10 to 20 per cent of people who show up at the hospital's emergency centre after the Ifar banquet suffer from problems caused by overeating," says a doctor at the state-run University Hospital in Amman.

However, compared to previous years, the situation appears to be improving as people appear to have become more aware over the dangers of overeating after breaking the fast, he adds.

"People who suffer from chronic kidney failure and stomach and kidney problems but insist on fasting should be even more careful when they have their iftar meal after not eating and drinking from dawn to dusk."

Other side-effects of excessive appetite for food and sweets during Ramadan include "food poisoning, rising levels of cholesterol and sugar in the blood and other previously unknown conditions," according to Ramzi Mazawi, member of the Jordan Medical Association.

Paradoxically, the month when Muslims are supposed to show solidarity with souls less fortunate, Ramadan has turned into a much-awaited consumer bonanza for shopowners,

restaurants and coffee shops.

While they scramble to lure customers by placing ads in the newspapers and promising gargantuan family meals at relatively low prices, the country's poor, who make up over 30 per cent of Jordan's 4.2 million people, turn elsewhere.

Many line up outside mosques where charities organise meagre mo'aw'ed al rahman — "mercy" mass meals — consisting of basic meals or wait at home for philanthropists to send them food packages. In some cases, they sift through garbage containers to find anything they can recycle or eat.

"God does not forget us," says Ahmad Alawin, a 12-year-old student taking out some domestic waste from a garbage container. "I always end up finding something to chew on," he says. "And this is better than the tea and bread we have to eat everyday at home when we break our fast."

The boy, who sells chewing gum at a traffic light in the heart of Amman, says he has a disabled father and his family of six rely on JD60 in monthly government grants.

As the call to prayer at sunset echoes across Jordan, many people charge

for dinner tables.

Everyone wants to try everything. But in some cases, stomachs — shrunk by a day of fasting when not even water is allowed — protest at the sudden intake and much of food ends up in the rubbish bin.

"Wasting food is against Islam, which urges help for the earth's millions of starving people," says an Islamist leader.

"The Prophet Mohammad broke his fast with dates and milk," he adds. "But in general, people do not want to hear this."

Meanwhile, Jordan Radio and Television broadcast daily programmes to inform citizens about the dangers of obesity and to educate them on how to cook healthy food.

Ramadan tents have become so popular that some restaurants and five stars hotels are providing them for guests and the population at large.

"We try to create a traditional atmosphere for the clients by serving special food and sweets associated with Ramadan," says Ahmad Masri, a restaurant manager.

Other tents host post-Ifar entertainment, including traditional musicians, hubbly bobbies and games to help people socialise.

## Iraq, Jordan sign oil supply agreement for 4.8 million tonnes of crude oil

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — Iraq and Jordan have signed an oil agreement under which Baghdad will supply Jordan with 4.8 million tonnes of crude oil and by-products in 1999.

The Iraqi News Agency (INA) said the agreement was signed by Iraq's Oil Ministry Undersecretary Taha Hrud Musa and Jordan's Energy Undersecretary Ahmad Basheer late on Monday.

Jordanian newspapers said Minister of Energy and Water Hani Mulki and Iraqi Oil Minister Amer Mohammed Rashid exchanged approvals of the new agreement by fax.

INA quoted Musa as saying that the agreement includes Iraq's commitment to provide Jordan with all its needs of

crude oil and its derivatives totalling 4.8 million tonnes.

He said the deal, under which sanctions-hit Iraq supplies Jordan with oil at concessionary rates in return for Jordanian food and medicine, effectively included a grant to Jordan of up to \$250 million.

Earlier, Basheer told Reuters that Jordan, dependent on Iraq for its oil needs, wanted to increase its oil purchases from Baghdad by 3 per cent from last year's 4.8 million tonnes.

He said Jordan's needs of refined products would be one million tonnes and the rest would be crude oil.

INA gave no other details of the deal and did not say whether Iraq had specifically rejected Jordan's requested increase.

In the past, Iraq has supplied some of the oil at market prices and the rest at concessionary rates, all paid for with Jordanian food and medical exports.

Mulki had been scheduled to arrive in Baghdad on Jan. 3 to sign the agreement with Iraq, but Basheer said his visit was called off because of a crisis over natural gas shortages in Jordan.

Since the 1991 Gulf War over Kuwait, Iraq has been exporting around 75,000 barrels of oil and 300 tonnes of gas a day to Jordan.

In previous years, when oil prices were higher, Iraq got in return around \$300 million to \$350 million worth of food and medicine from Jordanian firms.

Food and medical imports — if approval is granted by the United Nations Sanctions Committee on Iraq — are not covered by the sweeping U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The U.N. Sanctions Committee, however, does not have to rule on Iraqi oil supplies to Jordan, which have been quietly allowed to continue because Jordan has no other alternative sources of supply.

The U.N. also allows Baghdad separately to sell limited quantities of crude oil to buy food and medicine for Iraqis under the "oil-for-food" sale that began in December 1996.

Talks on the oil supplies appeared to be going ahead despite political tension.

## Gas arrives in Aqaba

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — A ship carrying 9,000 tonnes of liquefied gas docked at the port of Aqaba late Tuesday as a part of 40,000 tonnes deal between the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company and a Greek firm.

"The gas shipment was immediately unloaded and sent to the Kingdom's three gas stations," said Abdul Wahab Zu'bi, general manager of the firm.

Referring to some reports on gas agencies allegedly abusing citizens by hiking gas cylinder prices and tampering with contents of

gas cylinders to fill empty ones and later selling them, Zu'bi said, "The company will use its own vehicles if necessary to distribute gas cylinders to some parts of the Kingdom."

In an effort to keep gas reserves for rainy days, the company stored liquefied gas in Aqaba oval stores, with a capacity of 3,000 tonnes, at a \$30 million cost.

"The company's 84 trucks are currently transferring gas from Aqaba to the refinery company in Zarqa and to Abu Alanda gas station," said Zu'bi. The trucks transfer around 1500 tonnes of liquefied

gas daily.

The refinery earlier last month ordered 40,000 tonnes of gas from Greece company, but according to Zu'bi the shipment did not arrive on schedule. The delay, said Zu'bi, played a significant role in complicating the gas problem.

The rest of the shipment will arrive later this month. "A ship carrying 4,000 tonnes of liquefied gas is scheduled to dock the port of Aqaba on Jan. 10 and another 15 tonnes will arrive between 13-14 of January," said Zu'bi.

In its efforts to avoid a similar problem in the future, the refinery has ordered another 20,000 tonnes of liquefied gas.

The company officials are currently working around the clock to meet the demands of the Kingdom.

The refinery is selling around 126,000 gas cylinders each day.

The company's management deny any responsibility in causing the gas problem. It first blamed the cold front hitting the country which led to an unexpected increase in people's consumption of gas, and later blamed the American-led air strike on Iraq which hindered gas shipments from that country.

## JMA urges government, prisoners' families to press Israel to explain refusal of doctors' visit to prison

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — The head of the Jordan Medical Association (JMA) yesterday urged the government and families of Jordanian prisoners in Israeli jails to press Israel for an explanation of her refusal to allow five doctors to examine prisoners who are presumed ill.

"The Jordanian embassy in Tel Aviv asked [the medical association] to forward names of physicians, which we did, and Ambassador Omar Rifai forwarded these names to Israeli officials, and they were refused," said Bassem Dajani.

"Now, we expect the government and the families to initiate an appropriate action to get a response from the Israelis."

According to the JMA, Israel refused the request without explanation.

The JMA, staunchly anti-normalisation with Israel, along

with 13 other professional associations, have threatened to expel members who visit Israel or are involved in any way with the Jewish state.

The decision in December to send doctors on a humanitarian mission to examine the 14 prisoners — many of whom are believed to suffer from psychological and physical health problems — has tested the associations resolve in maintaining its fight against normalisation.

To circumvent their by-laws, the association chose five doctors resident in the West Bank but also members in the association, and believes now Israel refused the list of doctors for this very reason.

Dajani yesterday lambasted Israel for playing politics and trying to force the associations hand in normalising.

"Israel agreed to this mission not for humanitarian reasons,

but to get into this political issue," said Dajani. "They want [East Bank doctors] to normalise, which we absolutely refuse. If Israel has good will, they will accept any doctor that we choose."

An Israeli official yesterday said that the association's bluster words were "premature" and that Israel had not yet taken a decision on the matter.

"We are unaware of the names of any specific doctor," the source said. "We are aware of a formal request on behalf of the Jordanian embassy in Tel Aviv to permit a Jordanian doctor to visit the prisoners and we are considering it. We will advise the authorities as soon as a decision is taken, which I expect to be very soon."

Jordan's ambassador to Tel Aviv yesterday said the embassy was pursuing the issue.

The 14 prisoners are now

being held in the Ashkelon prison in southern Israel upon a request by the Jordanian authorities.

During the past four years, Israel released more than 20 Jordanian prisoners who were caught infiltrating into Israel or jailed for their affiliation to banned Palestinian groups.

Israel says the remaining 14 are convicted of serious offences, such as fatal attacks on Israelis. The Jewish state insists that they fulfill their terms in Israel while Jordan is seeking their handover to Jordanian custody.

Israel freed most Jordanian prisoners in its jails more than one year ago in exchange for two Mossad agents who attempted to assassinate Khaled Misha'al, a leading member of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

## Committee calls 1999 budget 'austere'

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Finance Committee of the Lower House of Parliament Wednesday submitted its report about the state's 1999 fiscal budget as presented last month to the House by Finance Minister Michel Mero.

Describing it as an austerity budget, the committee's chairman Ali Abul Ragheb said the budget would help meet national requirements and provides for allocations of funds needed to stimulate the national economy and

boost investments in Jordan. Abul Ragheb pointed out that the budget, which projects capital and current expenditure this year to reach JD2,160 million, has a JD32 million allocation to finance the social safety net plan to help the less-developed regions. It also includes allocations for the Ministry of Social Development to deal with poverty by providing help to needy people through the National Aid Fund and the Employment and Development Fund.

The committee has submitted to the government a number of recommendations, including ideas towards curtailing incompetence in the public administration and stimulating the national economy to help deal with the country's foreign debts, improve the treasury's stand and secure larger higher hard currency reserves needed for development projects, according to Abul Ragheb.

The committee urged the government to activate economic sectors that have witnessed slow growth in the past few years and to focus more attention on the agricultural and construction sectors which together generate the most employment opportunities.

Department of Statistics figures show that unemployment in 1998 reached 15 per cent among Jordanians above 15 years of age, and the committee urged the government to organise the local labour market to create jobs for Jordanians.

The government's budget deficit is estimated at JD435 million.

The committee emphasised the necessity of reducing expenditure and increasing revenues. It advised the government to exert greater efforts to ensure income tax collection from the all taxpayers and to avoid borrowing from local or foreign sources.

The committee urged the government to initiate contact

with creditor nations like Japan to write off or reschedule the Kingdom's debts, pointing out that foreign debt servicing is still high: total payments to creditor nations in 1998 amounted to \$905 million, of which only \$242 million were part of the principal and the rest was interest on the loans.

The committee suggested that the government adopt a new borrowing strategy to reduce interest rates on loans, saying the government should avoid guaranteeing loans to public institutions and instead should force these institutions to guarantee their financial viability.

The committee said the rate of economic growth should reach three per cent in 1999, up from 2.2 per cent last year, and that inflation is not expected to exceed four per cent. Exports and imports are both expected to rise by four per cent each.

The committee noted that 1999 revenues will amount to JD1,725 million, less than that of 1998 by \$29 million due to economic retreat which in turn reduced the private sector's income tax payments to the treasury. However, indications are that local revenues should cover the state's current expenditure, and nearly nine per cent of the capital expenditure this year.

The committee urged the Central Bank to speed up the introduction of a new banking law.

## Will too many cooks spoil the political party stew?

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — When talks started in mid-1996 for the merger of nine centrist parties into the National Constitutional Party (NCP), things seemed to be falling in place on Jordan's intricate political parties scene.

The introduction of pluralism in 1992, after more than three decades of martial law, had been understandably followed by an adjustment period. But the original 23 political parties were to become 15, and negotiations soon intensified for similar mergers among leftist groups. Prospects for a more modern and Western-like political environment, possibly divided into three blocs, as advocated by His Majesty King Hussein on many occasions, seemed more conceivable.

However, even before the NCP was officially launched in May 1997, three new parties — all nationalist — had already been born, and two more were to follow.

Today, after the sonorous defeat of political parties in the 1997 parliamentary elections, which rendered a mostly tribal Parliament, and amid popular apathy towards party work, yet two new parties are slated to be officially registered in the first half of 1999.

Mazen Rial, a long-time leftist activist who earned political stature through his work in the professional unions, assures that, notwithstanding the existence of 15 opposition parties and mounting popular criticism of their credibility and effectiveness, there is still a political vacuum that his new Jordanian Citizens' Civil Rights Movement Party can fill.

Rial's party, rechristened as "Al Humat" (The Defenders) by its founders, aspires to become the voice of the oppressed and underprivileged, fighting tribalism, corruption, and nepotism, along with all laws that encourage these practices.

While Al Humat will become the country's ninth leftist party — if Ba'athists are to be included in this category — Toujan Feisal is treading on virgin territory, by forming the first Jordanian liberal party.

A high-calibre opposition figure, enjoying a considerable and genuine following at home and the attention of international and regional media, Feisal is building her new party on the foundations

of her eight-year work as Jordan's only woman deputy ever, in the 11th and 12th Parliament. "It will be an Arab nationalist and liberal party, which is what makes it unique among Jordanian parties — we only have either Islamic or leftist [groups]," says Feisal.

She stressed, however, that "we are not founding a party because we want to organise the liberals, but because we are liberals, and we want to voice our [stand] side by side with the other political trends."

Criticising most of the existing parties as being motivated by self-interests, tribal considerations, and their leaders' thirst for power and money, Feisal does not hide her initial scepticism about forming a political party herself. "It was my supporters who wanted a party, after the massive forgery of the last elections," she recalls, referring to the 1997 polls, in which she lost her Third District Circassian seat amid widespread allegations of government election rigging and voting irregularities.

"We had already formed the Jordan Society for Democracy, but we soon realised that our scope was too limited, and the law did not even allow us to issue political statements as a society."

Hence, the one-year work to draft the by-laws of Al Ummah Al Fatah (The Young Nation), expected to be officially registered within the next two to three months.

The process was long "because we wanted [Al Ummah Al Fatah] to be not the image of the state we live in, but the image of the state we want," she says.

Almost universal predictions that an increased number of political parties will further weaken their overall performance do not worry Feisal.

"I do not have to convince people that my party will be different, because they already believe

in it. "There were times when high prices were paid. People know the amount of difference I made in Parliament and they know it is too late for anybody to try to buy me off," she asserts.

But Feisal's confidence must come to terms with the seemingly common perception that parties are ineffective. Even if internal feuds and corruption had not already decimated party structures, new parties or leaders may not be able to change much because party culture among most segments of society, and the supporting institutional mechanisms, have yet to take root.

A confirmation of popular disaffection with political parties comes from Jordan's biggest and best organised political party, the Islamic Action Front.

IAF sources privately admit that membership is decreasing, especially in peripheral branches, and that the party leadership has recently ordered local councils to provide detailed assessments on the crisis.

The Democratic Party of the Left, headed by Mousa Ma'aitah, has long proposed to allocate a percentage of Lower House seats to political parties. Such a reform would not only boost political parties, but also encourage coalitions, as a first step towards the formation of wider blocs and eventually mergers.

Interior Minister Nayef Qadi expressed in a recent interview the government's hope to see fewer, but stronger parties in the political arena.

"There are too many parties, and we hope that some will merge, although that does not mean that we want to see only one or two parties," Qadi said.

"It would be easier [for the government] to support them,

even financially, if they were fewer," he added.

The creation of new parties seems to be accompanied by an on-going fragmentation process within the already existing groups.

The Kingdom's oldest party, the Jordan Communist Party, for example, last year split into two factions over an internal row after surviving five decades undergirded and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each faction now has its own headquarters, leadership and secretary general.

Similarly, most of the prominent resignations that plagued the NCP during the past year were followed by speculations of new parties to be formed by the defectors.

Analysts maintain that, if a low number of parties does not necessarily mean a mature democracy, a high number of parties certainly does not.

But they seem sceptical that a reorganisation of political parties some into a smaller number of groups.

"Besides the historical and ideological reasons, such as the ones that led to the split of the Ba'athists into pro-Syrian and pro-Iraqi factions, there are important personal and social reasons [for such splits]," says Hani Hourani, Director of Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Centre.

"In some cases, former officials and tribal leaders resort to [forming] a party when they want to relaunch their image and acquire new political stature."

According to Feisal, "[forming] a party is a way for old forgotten statesmen to come back."

Long time Ba'athist Jamal Shaer explains the mushrooming of political parties in the Kingdom with the "complex of the second best" which may afflict Jordanian politicians.

"Everybody wants to be 'number one', and since there cannot be more than one 'number one' in each party, then all the others will leave and form their own new parties," Shaer contends.

Such protagonism could lead to a vicious circle, in which the weaker existing parties are, the more new parties will emerge.

The disdaining statement of former Interior Minister Nahir Rashid ahead of the last elections that "political parties have not enough men to stand around a mess" may then turn into a bleak prophecy.

## what's going on

### FILM

"Hear" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 10:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650457).

### EXHIBITIONS

Photo exhibition at the Royal Cultural Centre, until Jan. 16.

Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.

Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Saqra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 5699141/2).

"The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Oriah Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.

The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Fumun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.



## German opposition party warns against dual citizenship

BERLIN (AP) — Opposition to government plans to liberalise Germany's citizenship laws was the top item at a conservative party convention opening Wednesday, with some warning the reform would lead to foreign conflicts being fought on German soil.

Federal lawmakers from the Christian Social Union, a Bavaria-only party, were gathering in the state for a traditional three-day conference at an Alpine resort to plan strategy against the proposed dual citizenship reforms.

For days, CSU leaders have been attacking the centre-left government's plans to make it easier for foreigners to become Germans and still hold on to their original passport.

The government, which intends to pass the reforms by summer, argues they would promote integration by eliminating a major reason many of the 7 million foreigners in Germany decline to seek citizenship, even after living here for decades.

Opponents charge the routine acceptance of dual citizenship would foster resentment among other

Germans and lead to a wave of new immigration, as new citizens invite their relatives to join them in Germany.

They also say dual nationals might feel conflicting loyalties when serving in Germany's army, for example if a recruit with a Yugoslav passport were stationed in Bosnia or a Turkish soldier were sent to the Persian Gulf.

Less often mentioned but still a factor are conservative fears about whom the millions of new citizens would vote for.

A CSU internal document, published in the Bild tabloid Wednesday, warns that their votes "could decisively influence elections in Germany. Turkish or Islamic parties could gain seats and votes in the German parliament."

It also warned that conflicts like the Kurdish fight for autonomy in Turkey "will be carried to Germany." About 2 million Turks already live in Germany, including about 400,000 Turkish Kurds.

In a magazine interview this week, Bavaria state governor and CSU leader Edmund Stoiber said he thought dual citizenship

posed a greater threat to German security than the leftist terrorism carried out by the Red Army Faction in the 1970s and '80s.

Convinced that the majority of Germans are behind them, the CSU and its national sister party, the Christian Democrats, plan to launch a petition drive against the reforms this month.

But the campaign already has run into criticism even among conservatives.

CDU member Michel Friedman, who is also on the board of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said his party was making a big mistake with the petition drive.

"It's dangerous, populist and politically irresponsible," he told Berlin's Tagesspiegel newspaper.

CDU general secretary Angela Merkel said the petition would be worded so as not to encourage anti-foreigner sentiment. "It shall be a positive action," she told the Thueringer Allgemeine newspaper.

But CDU lawmaker Thomas Rachel told the Cologne Tageszeitung newspaper that the action would only raise more questions than it answered.

## Monitors condemn outbreak of violence in Kosovo's capital

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AP) — International monitors Wednesday assailed a rare outbreak of ethnic violence in Kosovo's capital that left seven people injured and a dozen cafés damaged from an explosion and subsequent melee.

An uneasy calm returned to Pristina, where some owners of vandalised cafés began immediate repairs but others remained closed amid fears of a repeat of Tuesday night's violence.

Monitors from the Kosovo Verification Mission, which is trying to prevent renewed fighting between Serbian forces and ethnic Albanian rebels in the secessionist Serbian province, declined to publicly assess blame.

"The OSCE condemns the incident and we condemn any sort of violence from either side," said spokesman Sandy Blyth of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which oversees the monitoring mission.

While conflicting accounts of the violence made it impossible to determine exactly what happened, Serb sources said it

began when a man tried to throw a grenade through the window of a café packed with young Serbs. Belgrade's independent B-92 radio said a major tragedy was averted only because the grenade bounced off the window frame and exploded in a courtyard, slightly injuring three Serbs from the flying glass.

Outraged, a large group of Serbs promptly retaliated against a row of Albanian-run cafés located underneath a nearby housing complex in the city centre.

B-92 said they emerged from a Serb café, using sticks and stones in their attack. But ethnic Albanian bystanders claimed they heard shooting, and reporters could see clear evidence of bullet holes in the smashed café windows Wednesday morning.

Four young ethnic Albanians also were seen being treated by a doctor late Tuesday for injuries they said they suffered in the violence, none apparently serious.

Pristina remains largely unscathed by the year of

bloodshed in Kosovo since Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milosevic began an offensive to crush separatist rebels. More than 1,000 people have been killed since the crackdown began last February, and tens of thousands remain homeless.

A shaky truce has largely held since October in the province, which is populated overwhelmingly by ethnic Albanians. But a flare-up of fighting last month has cast doubt on attempts to reach a political solution for Kosovo's future.

U.S. envoy Christopher Hill, whose months of shuttle diplomacy have produced little progress, was back in Kosovo on Tuesday for talks with ethnic Albanian political leader Ibrahim Rugova.

"I came to review the situation," said Hill, who acknowledged a "serious deterioration on the ground" in Kosovo during his recent absence.

"We need to make sure that cease-fire holds," he said.

"The cease-fire is critical to getting a political settlement."



Members of the Tibetan Youth Congress recite prayers as one holds a portrait of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, in central Delhi, at the end of an 11-day peace march from Chandigarh, some 250 kilometres north of here. Some sixty Tibetan students took part in the march aimed at attracting attention to the plight of Tibetans living under what they consider Chinese occupation (Reuters photo)

## Tibetans march in India to press for autonomy

NEW DELHI (R) — Dozens of Tibetans ended a 250 km peace march in the Indian capital Wednesday to demand that the United Nations consider recommendations to resolve their decades-old dispute with China.

The Tibetans, wearing sturdy shoes, bright yellow vests and headbands with "Free Tibet" written on them and carrying photographs of their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, walked for 12 days from the northern city of Chandigarh to Delhi.

"We think Tibet should be free so Tibetans can go back and our culture can be preserved," said a college student from Chandigarh participating in the march.

The Tibetans urged the U.N. to reopen the debate on the autonomy of Tibet, appoint a special rapporteur to look into human rights issues in the Himalayan

region as well as a special envoy to promote a peaceful settlement on the question of Tibet.

The Tibetans said they also wanted China to release "political prisoners".

"This year is the 40th year of our exile, it is an important year for us," Karma Yeshe, vice-president of the Tibetan Youth Congress which organised the march, told Reuters.

"It is our responsibility to pass on to young Tibetans our demands which will free Tibet in the next generation, if not in ours," he added.

The Tibet issue is a sensitive one for the United Nations where China is a permanent member of the 15-seat Security Council and would oppose concrete U.N. action as interference in its internal affairs.

"We have done a hunger strike in the past and will continue to demonstrate for our demands," Yeshe added.

Last year, 11 Tibetans began a hunger strike in Delhi and intended to fast until they died. One hunger striker set himself on fire and died of burns when police descended on the demonstrators fasting in the intense summer heat to take them to hospital.

The Tibetan activists halted the fast "temporarily" after some countries, including the United States and Norway, said they would discuss the Tibet issue with China and at multilateral forums.

Chinese troops marched into Tibet in 1950 and the Dalai Lama fled into exile in India nine years later after an abortive uprising against Communist rule.

China has rejected negotiations with the Dalai Lama about his return to Tibet until he acknowledges that the region is a part of China and that Taiwan is a Chinese province.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Three Ukrainians detained on suspicion of beheading dead bodies

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Police detained three young Ukrainians on suspicion of beheading four dead bodies in a regional morgue and stealing the heads, newspapers reported Wednesday. The corpses were beheaded in Oleksandrivka, a village in southern Ukraine where a regional morgue is located, the dailies Fakty and Segodnya said. Police officials detained three men, who confessed, the reports said. The four heads were found in an abandoned quarry near the village, the reports said. Segodnya suggested the three suspects were members of a satanic sect and needed the heads for a ritual linked to Orthodox Christmas, which starts Wednesday night. But district police investigator Vasyl Pakhalchuk had a different version, telling Fakty that the three — a villager and two friends who were visiting him — had too much to drink and wanted to "have some fun".

### Zimbabwean border-jumpers queue up at flooded Limpopo River

HARARE (AFP) — Hundreds of Zimbabweans planning to cross illegally into South Africa are lined up at the Limpopo River border waiting for floodwaters to subside, a local newspaper reported Wednesday. The Herald said the would-be border-jumpers had returned to their homes in Zimbabwe for the Christmas and New Year holidays and now wanted to go back to South Africa, where they work illegally. An official with a local council near the Beitbridge border post said hundreds of people had arrived in the area by bus and headed for traditional crossing points. There, they were waiting for the water level to drop before braving the crocodile-infested river. "We warned them not to gamble," he said. "The river is very full." He said there were unconfirmed reports that two men had already been swept away. In January last year, 36 Zimbabweans were reported to have drowned while trying to cross the Limpopo, which was again in flood. Official figures published in Harare show that South Africa deported 16,267 Zimbabweans during the first nine months of last year, mainly for illegal entry. The Zimbabweans seek work in South Africa because at home they are faced with an ailing economy and unemployment levels of more than 40 per cent.

### Yale professor pleads innocent to sex assault charge on boy

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — A Yale professor charged with child pornography has pleaded innocent to sexually assaulting a 13-year-old boy. Antonio Lasaga, 49, did not speak during his brief court appearance Tuesday. Lasaga, who is free on \$250,000 bond, also faces federal child pornography charges for allegedly using his campus computer to collect obscene materials. Police arrested the geology and geophysics professor in December. He was charged with two counts of sexual assault, risk of injury to a minor and promoting a minor in an obscene performance. WTNH-TV, citing police sources it did not identify, reported that Lasaga met the victim through a tutoring programme for inner-city schoolchildren. The station said the boy appears in an obscene videotape that authorities seized from Lasaga. Lasaga, who has been on Yale's staff since 1984, is on indefinite paid leave from the university. His arrest came after a graduate student noticed someone using Lasaga's computer password had downloaded child pornography from the Internet. William F. Dow, Lasaga's lawyer, said the professor "has the support of his family." "Like all cases, these are allegations. Just because someone made a claim doesn't mean there's any truth to it."

### Sri Lanka floods leave 24,000 families homeless

COLOMBO (AFP) — Heavy rains have flooded another region in Sri Lanka's east, raising to 24,000 the number of families made homeless, social services ministry officials said Wednesday. Nine thousand families in the Polonnaruwa district joined the 15,000 already displaced in the neighbouring Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts as well as the northern Wanni region, officials said. They said rains continued to cause havoc in low-lying areas in the past week. Local officials were seeking state aid to feed the people sheltering in schools and temples.

### Sri Lanka troops kill 7 Tigers

COLOMBO (AFP) — Government soldiers launched two attacks against Tamil Tiger guerrillas in northern Sri Lanka, killing at least seven rebels, the defence ministry here said Wednesday. An army patrol attacked a group of men from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who were building bunkers at Ampakamam and killed six, the ministry said. It said another rebel was shot dead by troops Tuesday at Oddusudan, also in the north of the country. The Tiger guerrillas are leading a campaign for independence in the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated. More than 55,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past 26 years.

### Travolta to receive first Alan J. Pakula prize

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Actor John Travolta is to be the first recipient of the Alan J. Pakula special prize at the fourth annual Television, Radio and Internet Film Critics Association awards ceremony next month. The new prize, named after the recently deceased director of "All the President's Men" and "To Kill a Mockingbird," was created to recognise a cinema professional for their "artistic excellence when illustrating a subject of great political and social importance." In 1998, John Travolta appeared on the screen as a southern governor running for the presidency of the United States in "Primary Colours" and as a lawyer who dedicated nine years of his life to fighting toxic waste polluters in "A Civil Action".

### Four Ukrainians die in separate grenade explosions

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Two men were killed by an explosion in the latest of a series of deaths involving grenades being handled by drunken revellers, officials said Wednesday. The two drunken men detonated an F-1 hand grenade that killed them both in the central town of Korosten Tuesday, the Emergency Situations Ministry said. And a woman injured by a hand grenade blast during a New Year party died in a hospital where she was brought along with four other people who were wounded in the blast Sunday. The grenade, police said, was detonated by a drunken 29-year-old man in a room filled with at least 10 party guests. A grenade explosion also was reported in the town of Ladiyzhin in central Ukraine. A 21-year-old man playing with the weapon was killed in the blast Sunday and two other men were wounded, the daily Segodnya said.

## Kenyan judge accused of graft in his own court

NAIROBI (AFP) — A Kenyan judge has been accused — in his own court — of accepting an \$80,000 bribe, local newspapers reported Wednesday.

The Commercial Court judge, Richard Kuloba, refused to comply with a lawyer's demand that he refer the bribery accusations to an independent arbiter, ruling that he would handle the allegations himself.

Dubai-based businessman Nassir Ibrahim Ali, in a sworn affidavit Tuesday, alleged that his rival, Kenyan businessman of Indian origin Kamlesh Patni, gave Kuloba the cash to rule in his favour in a suit over ownership of a chain of duty-free shops.

The affidavit said a man had seen two cartons full of bank notes being loaded into Kuloba's car.

Patni claims that Ali sold duty-free shops at Nairobi and Mombasa international airports to him and that he had refused to hand over the transfer documents. Ali, for his part, says that no such transaction took place and accuses Patni of forgery.

Ali's lawyer, Ochieng Oduol, demanded that Kuloba disqualify himself from hearing the case, and said Patni had promised to give the judge another \$116,000 once he had delivered the ruling.

Patni, along with three former high-ranking civil servants, is separately on trial for allegedly siphoning off \$300 million worth of export bonuses for fictitious sales of gold and diamonds in the early 1990s.

The so-called Goldenberg affair, named after the company that allegedly carried out the transactions, in which the central bank and treasury are also implicated, has become a symbol of high-level corruption in Kenya.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has called for the affair to be settled before reopening talks over the resumption of aid to Kenya, suspended since July 1997.

## Muslim dissident Abdic says he will not go to trial to Bosnia

ZAGREB (AFP) — Bosnian Muslim dissident leader Fikret Abdic said Wednesday he would not go to Bosnia to face trial on war crimes charges levelled by Bosnian authorities stemming from the 1992-95 war.

"I won't go to Bosnia to face trial. I don't want to answer anything that is included in criminal prosecution. And I have not been informed by the Hague tribunal or Bosnian justice of such a trial," Fikret Abdic told AFP by telephone from the Croatian port town of Rijeka, where he lives.

In 1996, Bosnian authorities accused Abdic of war crimes and crimes against civilians and prisoners of war during the 1992-95 war in Bosnia for

having detained 5,000 people in camps around Velika Kladusa — centre of the "Autonomous region of western Bosnia" proclaimed by Abdic in 1993.

The same year, a trial was opened against him in the western town of Bihać but adjourned.

Monday the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) gave the go-ahead for the trial to resume. Sarajevo reiterated its request to Croatia Tuesday to extradite Abdic, who has both Bosnian and Croatian citizenship.

Croatian Justice Ministry said that according to the constitution, a Croatian citizen cannot be extradited to another country.

It added that it has not yet received Bosnia's request to extradite Abdic.

But a 61-year-old Abdic — who was twice defeated by his ex-fellow and leader of Party of Democratic action (SDA) Alija Izetbegovic at the elections for the country's collective presidency in 1996 and 1998 — accused Izetbegovic and his party, "Islamic fanatics", of having launched "installed and fabricated accusations" against him so to eliminate him from political life in Bosnia.

"These accusations are a part of a campaign launched by Alija Izetbegovic against me", Abdic said. He rejected the accusations that he has opened

camps.

A member of Bosnia's presidency at the start of the 1992-95 war in Bosnia, he later broke ranks and forged links with Bosnian Serbs. Sarajevo government's war rivals.

Abdic, a charismatic person whom his devoted followers know as "Babo" (a Muslim name for a father in Bosnia), declared a mini-state around Velika Kladusa, before being ousted after which he and thousands of his followers fled to Croatia in mid-1995.

A millionaire ex-communist, Abdic now owns a private firm based in Croatian port of Rijeka and a big villa in the nearby popular tourist resort of Opatija.





Prince Edward, the youngest son of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, poses for photographers with his fiancée Sophie Rhys-Jones in the garden of St. James' Palace where they announced their engagement. The couple stated that they were hoping for a late spring wedding in St. George's Chapel in Windsor (Reuters photo)

## Prince Edward will marry his longtime girlfriend later this year

LONDON (AP) — Prince Edward, youngest son of Queen Elizabeth II, will marry his longtime girlfriend, Sophie Rhys-Jones, later this year, Buckingham Palace announced Wednesday.

The queen and her husband, Prince Philip, said they were delighted at the match.

The couple, who have dated for five years, "sought the permission of their respective parents between Christmas and the New Year," a statement from the palace said. "Both families are thrilled at the news."

The palace said the date and venue have yet to be decided, but the couple hope to use St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, the queen's

weekend home west of London, for a ceremony in late spring or summer.

Ms. Rhys-Jones' parents, Christopher and Mary, said they were "extremely pleased and very happy for Sophie and Prince Edward."

"We have always enjoyed Prince Edward's company and feel that they make a wonderful couple," they said from their home in the village of Brechley, south of London, where Ms. Rhys-Jones was raised.

The marriage is the first for both Edward, 34, a TV presenter and producer, and 33-year-old Ms. Rhys-Jones.

The queen's other three children have all been through divorces.

Throughout the couple's relationship, there have

been numerous false reports of an imminent marriage. Speculation intensified last year when Edward took out a 50-year lease on Bagshot Park, a former royal residence southwest of London, and the couple indicated Wednesday that they plan to make it their home.

After resigning from the Royal Marines in 1987, the prince began a career in the theatre with Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Company.

He is now an established documentary presenter and producer and is joint-managing director of his own company, Ardent Productions, which was set up in 1993.

Under the name Edward Windsor he has presented a TV series about his great-

uncle Edward VIII, who gave up the British throne to marry American Wallis Simpson, and has produced a drama series, "Annie's Bar," about lawmakers in the House of Commons.

Ms. Rhys-Jones, whom friends describe as gregarious, vivacious and down-to-earth, runs a magazine for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, a charity set up by her future father-in-law and handles the public relations of several unmarket companies. She plans to continue working after her marriage.

Before dating Ms. Rhys-Jones, Edward had been seen on the town with actress Ruthie Henshall, television presenter Ulrika Jonsson and model Romy Alderton.

## Indonesian rights group calls for halt of ongoing military trial

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesia's national rights watchdog Wednesday called on the military to halt an ongoing court martial of 11 soldiers accused of kidnapping activists, which they said showed attempts to cover up the real perpetrators of the crime.

The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) Wednesday in its annual evaluation of human rights in Indonesia in 1998 recommended that the trial be stopped as an initial step to regain public trust.

"As a measure to restore public faith in ABRI's sincerity, the trial proceedings should be stopped for justice, truth and the respect on human rights," Commission Secretary General Clementino dos Reis Anuar said in a statement.

Commission chief Marzuki Darsuman charged that the trial of the 11 members of the elite Kopassus force has been

"unfair" and detected efforts by the military to cover up the real perpetrators in the case.

"Since the start of the trial Komnas HAM has seen effort from ABRI to cover up the case, these 11 Kopassus members (are made to appear) as if they had acted on their own initiative, without orders from their superiors," Darsuman told a press conference here.

ABRI is the Indonesian acronym for the Indonesian armed forces.

When the kidnappings took place early this year, the Kopassus was under the command of a son-in-law of former President Suharto, now-retired lieutenant general Prabowo Subianto.

Darsuman underlined that the recommendation came as a "warning" and not as an "intervention" to the current trial. Prabowo had been in August reported by the press as having

admitted during a two-week probe by the military's Officers' Honor Council (DKP) that he had ordered the kidnappings. The council at the end of the investigation on August 24 discharged the general and two other officers for their role in the abduction and torture of political activists.

"In the DKP investigation Prabowo has once admitted that he had ordered the kidnappings. So, the (current) trial should consider the results of the DKP investigation to unveil this case," Darsuman stressed, accompanied by three senior members of the commission.

The court martial has been slammed by human rights lawyers as "a farce to protect the upper echelons of the military and Suharto."

The rights lawyers have seized on a previous prosecution argument that the 11 acted on their own volition, out of a

desire to defend the country from subversive elements.

The rights lawyers have said that given the rigid hierarchical nature of the military in Indonesia, such initiative was "impossible."

The court martial has had three sessions since it started on Dec. 23 and was scheduled to resume Friday.

Members of the elite troop were believed to be involved in the kidnapping and torture of 23 activists early this year, but the charges against the 11 soldiers only relate to the nine activists who have since surfaced.

The nine came back speaking of abduction, of being held incommunicado for months, of torture and finally of release accompanied by death threats should they tell others of their ordeal.

One was found dead and 13 others are listed as missing.

## Hundreds flee fighting in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — Rebel fighters infiltrated parts of Sierra Leone's capital Wednesday, triggering gun battles and artillery volleys along abandoned downtown streets.

At least a dozen rebels, armed with AK-47 assault rifles, were seen roaming through one residential compound as they declared they had arrived in the city to bring peace.

It was unclear how many rebels had arrived in Freetown, but a West African coalition force charged with defending the city had apparently failed to halt a threatened advance on the capital.

The echoing boom of artillery sounded around parts of Freetown.

Commanders from the West African force, known as ECO-

MOG, were not immediately available for comment. State radio, which hours earlier had been warning people off the streets, was broadcasting only music by mid-morning.

In the last information bulletin, Sierra Leone's Information Minister Julius Spencer confirmed fighting in the vicinity, but gave no details on the extent of the attack.

Spencer warned people to stay indoors even after a curfew was supposed to expire.

"Anybody found in the street from now on will be considered to be a rebel and shot," he said.

Spencer said the intervention forces, led by Nigeria, had been finding it difficult to engage the rebels because they had been mixing with the crowds. He did not say where people flooding the streets should go.

One unconfirmed report said prisoners, including scores of rebels, had been fired from the city's main prison. That report could not be independently confirmed.

Earlier in the day, thousands of people fled to the centre of Freetown after a two-hour barrage on the outskirts of the city.

The civilians, fleeing on foot and in vehicles, retreated after the onset of firing from an industrial area about 10 kilometres from Freetown.

Government soldiers and ECOMOG troops are battling the rebel Revolutionary United Front, which has fought a long-running war in Sierra Leone.

The rebel force, which has been accused of widespread atrocities, including the murder and torture of countless villagers, launched a renewed

offensive in December. It has swept through several towns in the east and north of the country since then.

The intervention force has managed to thwart until now threatened attacks on Freetown.

The first attacks, which began just after 1:30 a.m. local time (0130 GMT), lasted about two hours and then subsided, only to begin again inside the city centre.

President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was deposed in a coup in May 1997 by a military junta allied with the rebels. Soldiers from the intervention force restored him to power 10 months ago.

Since then, the insurgents have been rebuilding, strengthened by defections from Sierra Leone's military and mercenaries from Liberia.

## Cambodia rules out military operation to arrest Khmer Rouge

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — The Cambodian government Wednesday ruled out any military operation to arrest Khmer Rouge leaders if they are called to stand trial for genocide, saying it would risk sparking renewed conflict in this war-torn country.

Any attempt to pluck defectors Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea or Ieng Sary from retirement in the former guerrilla stronghold and semi-autonomous jungle town of Pailin would be potentially destabilising, Secretary of State for Information Khieu Kanharith said.

"If there is a military operation to arrest them it could start a war again," he said. "We have had enough of fighting."

However, he refused to speculate on how the men could be captured from their sanctuary in the isolated base, which is guarded by a small but battle-hardened corps of former Khmer Rouge fighters.

"First they have to be summoned to court, then we will see what position we are in," Khieu Kanharith said.

There have been growing international calls for lead-

ers of the genocidal Khmer Rouge to face trial, following the defection on December 25 of Pol Pot's ideologue Nuon Chea, 71, and Khmer Rouge head of state Khieu Samphan, 67.

Following a warm government welcome and VIP holiday tour of the country, the two architects of the regime that killed up to two million people moved to Pailin where they join Pol Pot's former foreign minister Ieng Sary, who defected in 1996.

However, much of Phnom Penh's control of the isolated north and west of the country depends on the allegiance of Khmer Rouge defectors now on the government payroll. Analysts say an arrest of their former comrades could affect their loyalty.

Prime Minister Hun Sen initially gave a warm welcome to the pair and called on people to "dig a hole and bury the past" — causing an outcry against his apparent anti-face-to-face to press for justice.

The strongman — himself a former Khmer Rouge field commander — then defended his policy, asserting the two had not been given immunity while for-

eign minister Hor Namhong said the government still wished to see justice.

While Cambodia's leadership — citing the need for "national reconciliation" — appears to lack the political will to direct the judiciary here to take the initiative, they are facing mounting external pressure in favour of a trial.

The United States, France and Britain have expressed backing for a justice to be done, while neighbouring Thailand said resolution of the issue was a condition for the country's acceptance into the international community.

And the official Vietnamese press Wednesday also lent its backing to calls for a trial, in the country's first public support for such a move since the Christmas Day defections.

"Millions of Cambodians were massacred in a barbarous manner by the Khmer Rouge and time has not erased their crimes," the official Communist Party mouthpiece Nhan Dan said in a commentary. "Their crimes cannot be justified or excused and

they must be punished," said the daily.

Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 following border clashes and drove the Khmer Rouge led by its notorious supreme Pol Pot from Phnom Penh in January 1979. Pol Pot died in April and his body was unceremoniously burnt on a pyre of old tyres and furniture.

However, the biggest backer of the ultra-Maoist Khmer Rouge, China, has maintained the issue is an internal matter for Cambodia, raising fears in some quarters that it could block a proposed international tribunal.

The New York Times reported Tuesday the United States was quietly conducting negotiations aimed at avoiding a Chinese veto in the U.N. Security Council to prevent a tribunal from being set up.

A U.N. report containing recommendations on how to proceed with an international trial of senior Khmer Rouge leaders is expected to be ready in weeks, following a November visit to Cambodia and Thailand by a U.N.-appointed team.

## Human rights group slams Kazakh election process

ALMATY (R) — Kazakhstan's presidential election process is "grossly unfair" a U.S.-based human rights group said Wednesday, just four days ahead of the ballot.

"Coercion, threats and the repression of opposition activists have characterised the presidential election campaign in Kazakhstan," Human Rights Watch said in a strongly-worded statement.

In a letter to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Holly Carter, Human Rights Watch executive director for Europe and Central Asia, said the OSCE should protest by postponing establishment of a planned field office in Kazakhstan.

The OSCE has already criticised the election and

warned it would not recognise the results if voting went ahead as planned.

Human Rights Watch attacked President Nursultan Nazarbayev's decision to bring the vote forward from late 2000, saying it allowed his opponents insufficient time to mount a serious challenge.

The group also said some candidates, including key opposition figure and former prime minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, had been wrongly banned from the election for minor administrative offences, a charge also made by the OSCE and the U.S. government.

The statement attacked authorities for putting pressure on voters and independent media to back Nazarbayev, who is widely expected to win comfortably Sunday, extending a reign he started as Kazakhstan's Communist Party chief under Soviet rule.

"President Nazarbayev likes to present himself as a dignified partner for Western leaders and investors," the statement said.

"But the way his government has twisted arms in this campaign should leave no illusions about what kind of leader Nazarbayev really is."

The 58-year-old former metal worker enjoys sweeping executive powers and has ruled virtually unopposed since Kazakhstan's independence from Moscow in 1991.

He has succeeded in attracting billions of dollars of foreign investment in the oil, gas and metals sector.

## 'China authorises police to fire on protesters'

BEIJING (AFP) — China's leadership has authorised its law enforcers to open fire on demonstrators if they need to disperse protests provoked by its economic reforms, a U.S.-based dissident group said Wednesday.

"The Chinese Communist Party Central Political and Judiciary Committee issued a classified directive to all public security forces and the armed police a few days ago," the Free China Movement said in a statement.

"The directive provides for the armed forces to immediately open fire on mobs or organised gangsters without warning and without reporting to their superiors in advance under (certain) circumstances," it said.

Attacks on leaders' residences, military or police facilities, key government agencies or broadcasting facilities and theft of weapons were among circumstances where such action could be taken, it said.

In particularly sensitive cities which have already seen sporadic protests from unpaid and laid-off workers like central Wuhan and Changsha, in southern Hunan province, rules had been issued to prohibit the blocking of traffic.

Police could use force if protesters refused to retreat within five minutes in those cities, the organisation said.

China has been hit by a spate of protests as its draconian reform of its inefficient and debt-ridden state-owned sector has resulted in millions of redundancies.

The government showed its sensitivity to the subject of social unrest when last month it sentenced labour activist Zhang Shuangui to 10 years' imprisonment for "endangering state security."

Zhang had set up an organisation to protect the rights of laid off workers and given an interview to U.S.-based Radio Free Asia on peasant unrest.

China does not allow any trade unions or labour organisations other than those sanctioned by the Communist Party and regularly throws unofficial labour organisations into prison.

More than 10 million workers have already been laid off from loss-making state enterprises and there are plans to cut six million more jobs this year, moves which could lead to widespread social unrest as redundant workers are cut off from cradle-to-grave housing, medical care and pensions.

"We have kept on receiving calls from people asking us what they should do because their rights of survival are threatened," the Free China Movement statement said.

## Clinton's impeachment trial begins today

WASHINGTON (AP) — Split even among themselves, Senate Republican leaders are struggling for agreement with Democrats on how to proceed when President Bill Clinton's impeachment trial begins Thursday.

Beyond establishing a date to formally open the historic perjury and obstruction of justice trial, nearly everything else is unsettled — from whether there will be witnesses to the length of the proceedings.

"It has to be done not only expeditiously, but fairly," Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi said after meeting Tuesday with Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle and Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, who will preside over the first impeachment trial of a president in 130 years.

Some two weeks after a House of Representatives vote made Clinton just the second impeached president in history, the 106th Congress took its seats Wednesday with the trial at the top of the agenda. In the House, one of the first orders of business will be to reappoint the 13 House Republicans who will serve as prosecutors in the Senate trial.

Daschle told reporters Tuesday that starting the trial without a defined plan for proceeding would be an "invitation to a prolonged process that would take weeks if not months, probably months."

At the White House, spokesman Joe Lockhart said the uncertainty leaves the president's lawyers "in the position of

preparing for all eventualities. In general, we'd like to know which direction we're going in, but we understand the process."

The White House signalled this week it would present an aggressive defence if the Senate conducted a full-blown trial.

Fresh criticism surfaced among Republicans Tuesday over the bipartisan plan for a proceeding as short as a week — a proposal mostly favoured by Democrats looking for a vote to censure the president rather than remove him from office. The likelihood of a longer trial, meanwhile, grew — with some senators predicting it could last well into next month.

"I am not at all worried about a two-to-three week process that could take us into mid-February," said Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho, a member of the Republican leadership.

The uncertainty persisted as the Senate's senior Democrat, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, issued the first indication that any of the Senate's 45 Democrats could vote to remove Clinton from office.

On the final vote on the articles of impeachment, "I could go either way based on the evidence as I've seen it or heard it. And I've followed it pretty closely," he said in an interview on the C-Span cable TV network.

According to Senate sources who spoke on condition of anonymity, Lott said in closed-door meetings during the day that following Thursday's largely ceremonial events, he wants opening arguments presented

the following Monday by representatives of the House and the White House.

Craig said he envisioned giving each side three or four days to present its evidence. Each could then submit a list of witnesses for the Senate to subpoena, subject to a vote.

But Daschle, who agreed the ceremonial opening was likely for Thursday, told reporters his preference was for no witnesses. He added he wants a vote on censuring the president after an expected rejection of the articles of impeachment.

But Daschle told reporters at days' end that neither he nor Lott would be presenting formal proposals in separate closed-door caucuses of Senate Democrats and Republicans.

Meanwhile, the 13 House Republicans who will act as prosecutors in the Senate trial gave their take on the debate during a meeting Tuesday night, the eve of Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde's meeting on logistics with Lott.

No consensus was reached on just whom to call as a witness, said Rep. Bill McCollum, a Florida Republican. But he estimated that the House would need two or three weeks in the trial just to present its case against Clinton.

The House approved articles of impeachment on Dec. 19, alleging that Clinton committed perjury and obstructed justice as part of a months-long campaign to cover up his sexual relationship with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.



To battle low prices and weak demand, oil producers will merge and come back to the world's cheapest and biggest reserves, those of the Gulf. With the oil industry returning to the region, we must recall oil tycoon J. Paul Getty's mid-century declaration: "If one is to be anybody in the oil business, one must have a footing in the Middle East." Such trends will gather pace in a redrawing of the world's energy map in 1999.



# Of all the places in all the world, the century had to pick this one

Anadyr in Russia's frozen far north is the last place on earth that you'd choose to see in the New Year. But, a cruel twist of geography, it'll be the first to greet the new millennium. Wrap up and get down for the coldest party of the year...

By Phil Reeves

THIS IS where Time Present meets Time Past. A few score miles to the east, across the frozen Bering Sea, lies the International Dateline, the United States and yesterday. Head west across the tundra, and you also traverse back in time through the 24-hour-sized segments that girdle the planet. There is no later hour than here; this is the first time zone, one of its bleakest parts. It is here, in Russia's far north-east, that in one year's time this millennium will quietly slide into the next. Long before the citizens of London, Paris and New York have gathered to toast the first few seconds of the New Age, it will have dawned here on a world which, though permanently ahead of the clock, is heading backwards.

Welcome to Chukotka, the meeting point between Asia and the West, a region the size of France but which now has a smaller population than Reading. Welcome, to be more precise, to Anadyr, the regional centre where we have arrived as guests of the governor at the start of a four-day odyssey over the Arctic lands which he seeks to rule.

When, on January 1, 2000, the sun finally drags itself above the horizon for a few fallow hours, it will illuminate these wide streets of ice, these dreary apartment blocks, shacks on stilts, and empty steel containers (testimony to the steady depopulation). In Fiji, New Zealand or Vanuatu, which share its time zone, the next century's first view of the world will surely be idyllic — but not here.

It is Saturday, but we are wondering where most of Friday went. On Thursday evening we boarded our charter plane in Moscow — nine hours' flying time and nine time zones away — and late Friday night we disembarked. Our party comprises about a dozen Moscow-based journalists and a blonde, milk-wrapped Moscow TV star called Aida Nevskaya, who seems to spend her time scouring the empty landscape in search of fans, and who — bafflingly — has brought her sunglasses with her. Some of the group say they caught a glimpse of the day through the plane window, a red rag of light waved briefly at us from the horizon. But most of Friday was lost.

So Saturday it is. Today our host, the governor, a stout and energetic man called Alexander Nazarov, summons us to tell us about Chukotka's economic prospects and problems. We are here because he is keen to attract international investment in the gold

industry, as his semi-autonomous region has the second-largest reserves in Russia. He also reveals that he is planning to erect an international hotel in Anadyr, where the world's media can stay when they arrive to cover the opening of the millennium (the BBC is already expressing interest).

Later, he tells me that he has "big plans" for the special day. "We will set the tone for the new millennium," he declares. He doesn't, however, give any details.

Certainly, the new hotel is a good idea. The current one is a run-down Soviet affair where the governor's enthusiasm for the new millennium is not shared by the staff. "We aren't interested," says Tanya Simkuchova, 41, an administrator. "We have more important worries." Like, for example, wages: she hasn't been paid for four months.

Anadyr also needs a new restaurant. There are only two in town, one of which is a gloomy little dive that calls itself a pizza house. Here I am given a bun, with reindeer meat buried in it. Everyone eats reindeer here, even for breakfast (it costs just over a dollar a kilo). The residents hang plastic bags of it out of their apartment windows. In these temperatures, there's no need for a freezer.

Max, a client of the pizza house, looks like a reindeer-eater. He is a human tank with a tundra-like, quarter-inch haircut whose drink-fuelled desire to speak English far outweighs the minor inconvenience that he doesn't know any. But it is clear that the young man is not happy. "We have big girls," he says, gesturing at a table of women. Why, he asks — switching to Russian — won't we dance with them?

So this, we can assume, is what New Year's Eve 1999 will look like in Anadyr. At the end of the room, a solemn-faced man dressed like a Sixties Butlins redcoat is playing the "Macarena" on electric guitar. Soon the big girls are dancing hard, their feet thumping the worn floorboards.

Sunday. We set off in a 14-year-old Soviet AN-24 propeller plane north for Egevekinot — an old Gulag town — and then on to a battered Mi-80 helicopter to Konegino, a hamlet of 700 people mostly occupied by Chukchis.

History has been unkind to the Chukchis, the region's largest non-Russian ethnic group. For centuries, they lived on the tundra, subsisting on

reindeer herding and hunting whale and walrus, while Russians, Americans, Britons and other adventurers swept in and out in search of furs and gold. But the Soviets decided to collectivise their herds (a task that they were still struggling to accomplish by the fifties) and put their children into boarding schools to force-feed them with Moscow's ideology. Severed from their roots and traditions, the Chukchis fell victim to drink and social despair.

eaten Mars bar turns so hard you can cut yourself with it. Touch a metal door handle without gloves, and you hit the pain zone where the fingertips cannot tell if they have been burnt or frozen.

We have flown west to Bilibino, 60 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The 11,000 residents (half the town's Soviet-era population) have various means of keeping warm — we meet one woman wandering around clutching a hot water bottle under her fur coat —

The governor is keen to show off his nuclear plant, so we drive there across the ice roads in Jeeps, their interiors lined with thick carpet to keep out the cold. Within, it is smart, bright, clean and busy. The conference room, where the acting director meets us to explain how his plant abides by international safety standards, is adorned with plaques proclaiming its excellence. These would have been more reassuring if several cameramen had not managed to get into the reactor area, unescorted and unprotected, while the governor's party and the staff gathered to toast each other with cognac.

The governor and his crew know they can get out of here. Vladimir Vodolazki, 54, duty officer in the station's control room, moved to Bilibino 20 years ago, and cannot afford to leave. "I came here as a young romantic, and ended up a prisoner," he remarks. A prisoner trapped in an Arctic nuclear power station, thousands of miles from anywhere. You can hardly make a worse start to the new millennium than that.

Tuesday: You need to drink to keep warm, to keep your spirits up in this twilight world. I entirely accept that. The climate here is so hostile that its own football team, Spartak-Chukotka — the governor's pride and joy — is based 5,000 miles away in Moscow for most of the year. But vodka for breakfast? To be fair, there was a choice. Bottles of wine and beer also stood on the table. Requests for soft drinks bring puzzled looks from the restaurant waiters.

In the back of Russia's beyond, they seem to drink even harder than they do in Moscow. As we fly around the emptiness of the Arctic in our propeller plane, like the court of a minor medieval potentate, the governor's band of dishevelled aides crack open bottles of cognac and vodka and gobble down chunks of frozen wild goose meat and sausage. Yesterday, several were so drunk that they could barely get off the plane. The governor himself remains restrained, pondering the mighty issues that face him.

This morning we board the AN-24 and fly to Pevek, a port and mining town built on the edge of the Arctic Ocean six decades ago by prisoners at the height of Stalin's fanatical attempts to colonise the north. Thousands of people died in the process. It is minus 33 Celsius, but there is a

brisk wind coming in from the frozen sea that makes it seem even colder than Bilibino. We are walking along the front when an old woman approaches my colleague, Will Englund from the Baltimore Sun. "Cover your nose quickly!" she says. We notice that, although we have only been outside for a few minutes, the tip of his nose has gone bright white, the first sign of frostbite.

Every story here is a sad one. A group of municipal workers have been on hunger strike for a fortnight because they haven't been paid for three-and-a-half years. "This town is quietly dying," says Alla Yevstigneyeva, 59, the manager of a local grocery store. "It is an irreversible process."

And dying it surely is: the population of the surrounding area has fallen from 34,000 in 1991 to 12,500 today, mirroring a fall that has been Chukotka's population shrivel to 90,000, half the size of a few years ago. The Soviets — Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians — are steadily moving out, abandoning the landscape again to the Chukchis and reindeer and wolves. But leaving is costly. Like everyone, Mrs. Yevstigneyeva also wants to head for the real, light, normal world... if only she could afford a flat somewhere else.

Ten years ago, when he first arrived, this town was fun, says Dr. Alexander Maslov. Like everyone, he was lured north by the promise of higher pay. At 32, he is now chief doctor at the Pevek hospital. A few years back, he earned the rouble equivalent of \$1,000 a month, and had a big apartment. The streets teemed with life on holidays. No more. His salary — delayed from months these days, like everyone else's — is worth a fifth of what it once was. "What's happening is very hard to bear," he says.

So hard that some people seem to be on the edge, grappling with total breakdown. When we go to a bar, a middle-aged woman with bright peroxide hair gives us — by way of a gesture of hospitality — a plate of sliced lemons to eat. We return the compliment by buying her a bottle of Russian champagne.

A conversation starts, but within a few moments her mood changes from calm urbanity to tears and anger. "God has forgotten this place!" she bellows, trembling. "We gave everything to the Motherland! But we have nothing now!"

We leave, embarrassed, uneasy, eager now to end this odyssey of the Arctic, unable to offer any suggestion, any hope that would help her, or the rest of this abandoned place, to weather the first years of the new millennium.

Happy New Year, Chukotka. And — when it dawns — may the next century be far, far better than the last.

— The Independent



They are now a favourite butt of Russian jokes — like the Belgians to the French.

There will be no pre-millennium tension here; no fretting about which frock to wear, or which party to go to. Here, like Anadyr, there are more pressing matters, such as survival. Any Chukchi born today is not likely to make it beyond four decades or so: average life expectancy has fallen to between 40 and 45. For most adults here, their experience of the next millennium is likely to be fairly brief.

Monday: It is beyond comprehension that anyone should live in a place as cold as this. The low hills and forests of central Chukotka are cloaked in a grey haze of deep, deep refrigeration. It is like glimpsing the Ice Age. At minus 49 Celsius, the air is so cold that it scalds the lungs.

A rouble banknote held between the fingers turns brittle in seconds. A half-

but the main source of heat comes from a big concrete atomic power station a few miles out of town.

You might think that Bilibino's residents are none too happy about living on top of a nuclear station. Far from it. They like the plant. It guarantees them heat and light, treasured services in an ice-world where nothing else is certain. "You get used to it," says Ludmila Dubina, a school librarian, who has lived here 23 years. "It is better to live near an atomic station, and have heat, than not to have any."

Vladimir Boiko, the local police chief, was living in Ukraine, his native republic, when Chernobyl blew up in 1986; yet he, too, has nothing bad to say about the power station. "What do I care? At least we're warm," he grins. And that's true: Bilibino almost seems to revel in its round-the-clock heating: in the foyer of the sports centre, there are lemon trees growing in pots.

## Something evil in your inbox

By Steve Phillips

WHEN AN e-mail titled Your Property arrived at my inbox at work, it brought a smile to my face. It was two years since we advertised our house on the Web. When it was sold soon afterwards, by more conventional means, I let the Web estate agent know, but the advert remained on-line. Once in a while, somebody missed the "Sold" banner and got in touch, and here was another one.

This message, however, was different. A page of bizarre insults about the house, quite a bit of random swearing, followed by an offer — would I swap the house for a night with his wife?

The author, a Mr. Zachopoulos, was using an e-mail address provided by Hotmail, the free-mail service owned by Microsoft, so there was no clue to his location. A few hours later he followed up with another message. Had I considered his more than generous offer? I decided, perhaps foolishly, to respond. I told him that I found his messages offensive, and that I would forward them to Hotmail.

The Hotmail website gave me an address for complaints about unwanted e-mail, and within minutes of sending the messages, back came a reply from their auto-respond system. There was a lot of information about how good Hotmail is at stopping misuse of their mail accounts, and a promise to reply to me as soon as possible. They never did.

The next day, Mr. Zachopoulos changed his name to Mr. Wrench, and came back with more streams of abuse from the same Hotmail address. Later on, another message arrived from a Carl Smith, with an e-mail address of snrmanage-

ment@hotmail.com. He told me that the culprit, a German schoolboy using his father's account, had been traced and the account removed. He hoped that I could forgive him. Carl's message contained a lot of spelling mistakes.

Three days later, it started again. The e-mail address had changed to one provided by postmaster.co.uk, but the abuse was the same, if not worse. I found the complaints address at Postmaster, and forwarded the message to them. Back came a reply promising to look into it.

That was the last I heard from them. The next two hours brought a further eight messages. First of all, a warning from Carl Smith that the culprit had started to use a new Hotmail address, and that they were continuing to monitor him. Oddly enough though, this time the message was signed by Carl Thomas.

Then there were three messages from the new address, more obscene insults, this time signed by Andy K. Then another from Carl Smith/Thomas, assuring me that they were doing all they could to trace the messages. Another thought came to me. Hotmail is based in the United States, on the West Coast — how come all these nice people were working so hard when they should be in bed? When I tried to contact them by phone, even the fax machine was turned off.

A few minutes later, more garbage arrived, with my own name in the "from" box. But underneath it, the e-mail address was still the latest Hotmail one.

Finally, to round the day off, a Mr. Fielling of foreignenquiries@hotmail.com informed me that the culprit had been traced and was now being arrested "for Internet crimes." He also mentioned that I would be

'A page of bizarre insults... followed by an offer — would I swap the house for a night with his wife?'

chance that the BBC would be using my case in a documentary about e-mail abuse. He gave me a name at the BBC, but a quick check with them proved that this was fictitious. When I told Carl this, he turned nasty, and threatened to take my name off the list which he was sending to the producer.

At this point, I decided to try Hotmail again. I sent all the details to their Advertising Sales department, where I thought that a human might read the incoming messages. Sure enough, somebody replied, saying that they had forwarded my complaint to the Abuse department. Apart from two more auto-respond messages, I heard no more.

Over the weekend, all went quiet, but on the Monday, a new record of 12 messages arrived. By now, Carl

had dropped all pretence of being senior management, and he weighed in with his own stream of abuse.

A different approach was called for. The header information of the messages contained an IP address, the number which identifies networked machines. The first three numbers were always the same, but the fourth varied. I went to a website (www.ripe.net) where you can find out who an IP address is allocated to. This told me that the range of addresses belonged to a U.K. Internet service provider. A couple of phone calls got me through to their support department. At last, a human voice who could help me. He confirmed that the addresses were those used by a number of schools on their dial-in service.

I sent him the full collection of messages, from the times of the messages and the IP addresses, he was able to pin it down to one school. The school was informed, and they began to monitor the Web activity on their computers. The next day I was told that the culprit had been identified.

That, I hope, is the end of it. Maybe I was wrong to reply in the first place — but perhaps my efforts have spared someone else the same treatment. It has certainly shown, despite their claims, how powerless the e-mail service providers are.

Maybe they are flooded with similar complaints, but at a time when I wanted to know what was going on, I heard absolutely nothing from them. Even if they did manage to close down one account, another one was opened.

If Carl ever gets a spell-checker, he might start to fool people.

— The Independent

## Planning ahead taking the holistic approach

By Jean-Claude Elias

THE MODULARITY of personal computers is one of their most attractive qualities. Being able to add, replace, remove, repair or manipulate in any way the different components that make a PC is an obvious advantage. It gives the user the reassuring feeling of being in control. It also makes upgrades less expensive and, arguably, easier. But except in rare cases, upgrading one single element without also taking care of other elements working directly in conjunction with it may lead to disappointing results.

For instance, if you are not satisfied with the multimedia speakers of your computer, replacing them with a superior pair could just not be enough. In most cases changing the sound card that actually delivers the sound to the speakers is necessary to actually feel the benefit.

The same is true for monitors. Dumping your old 14" screen for a trendy 17" may bring you only a larger but not necessarily better image. Upgrading the display controller — the card inside the PC that "produces" the image and sends it to the monitor — is as important if not more than the replacement of the screen itself.

An extreme example is the new motherboards — the main board inside a computer's case — that can accept more than one

### chip talk



processor. With such a board you can install 2 or more Pentium chips in your PC. As tempting as

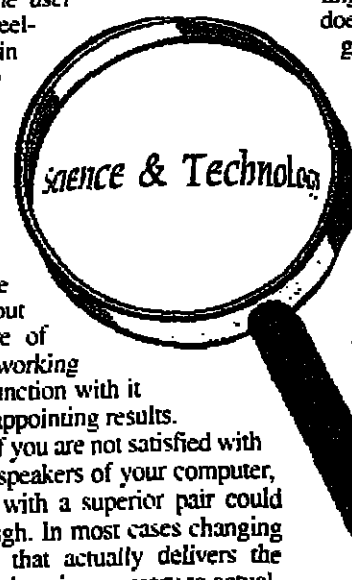
it sounds, you won't be able to benefit from such power without changing the Windows version you may have. Indeed, only Windows NT can control and make use of multiple processors. But Windows NT, a more professional version of Windows 95/98, doesn't exactly work like its simpler siblings. It is more difficult to handle and doesn't automatically run all the programmes that work under Windows 95/98.

Therefore, moving to a multiprocessor platform is not a step to take without careful planning.

Perhaps the computer's main memory — the RAM — is the one component that can be upgraded with immediate, direct benefit, without having to also change too many other parts. All recent application programmes, from Internet browsers to graphic software, have shown they perform better and faster when you provide them with more memory. Some software designers go as far as to tell users that "there is no such thing as too much memory" confirming the importance of the memory element. Practically however, 128MB of RAM has proven to be plenty for most standard applications. Beyond this number

the upgrade becomes very expensive and the benefit less obvious, except in the world of professional digital sound and image processing.

Apart from the main memory, the replacement, the upgrade or the removal of the separate components of a PC should only be done by taking into consideration all the other components of the machine, be it hardware or even software. Failure to do so may result in inefficient systems.





## Kuwait cabinet approves tough economic reforms

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait's cabinet Wednesday approved a tough economic reform plan which would raise the cost of living by decreasing some subsidies and increasing non-oil income through new charges.

"The plan also deals with proposals to redraw basic public services for gradual implementation, rationalising spending and making sure that subsidies reach those who really deserve them," a government statement said after a meeting Wednesday.

The long-promised plan now goes to the elected parliament for approval. Parliament had passed a law obliging the state to refer any proposed hikes in rates for basic services to it.

Other parts of the plan do not fall under that requirement and the government could move in the meantime to raise import tax on some commodities and charges for services like airport departure tax, residency and work permits, driving licences and increase fuel prices.

Ministers have already prepared the public for difficult and tough measures and called for "cooperation and understanding" because of a sharp drop in oil revenues.

Details of the comprehensive plan have been published in Kuwait, an OPEC member which produces just under two million barrels of oil per day, but no exact figure for the expected additional revenue was given.

Finance Minister Ali Salem Al Sabah had earlier said that the government hopes to raise charges by 10-30 per cent for heavily-subsidised basic services such as water and electricity.

Some members of parliament have said the state aims to raise non-oil income by some 250 million dinars (\$829 million) through a series of measures which will also lead to a cut in capital expenditure.

In recent years, Kuwait's non-oil income has been budgeted at around 550 million dinars but actual income has come in below 400 million dinars while oil revenue exceeded projections of around 2.555 billion dinars.

But officials, seeking to rally support for the reforms, now note that expenditure in the 1998/99 (July-June) budget is more than double the oil income which was calculated at \$10 a barrel for Kuwaiti crudes now trading below that level.

The 4.362 billion dinar budget carries a projected net deficit of 1.919 billion

dinars and a gross deficit of 2.163 billion dinars.

Forecast oil revenues of 1.894 billion dinars in 1998/99 are some 30 per cent below actual oil income the previous year when Kuwaiti crudes were budgeted at an average \$13 a barrel.

Parliament has already approved the first of the reforms by passing a health insurance scheme obliging most of Kuwait's 1.4 million foreign residents to pay 50 dinars a year for services and medicines currently offered largely free of charge.

Economists say expatriates were expected to foot a large portion of the rise in the cost of living in the country of some 750,000 Kuwaitis accustomed to generous benefits in the cradle-to-grave welfare system and large public sector salaries.

Oil Minister Saud Nasser Al Sabah said Tuesday night that despite the harsh economic realities, Kuwait has continued to supply basic services and citizens were receiving salaries on time compared to neighbouring countries where some state employees had not been paid for three months.

## Clinton sees \$76 billion budget surplus in fiscal '99

WASHINGTON (R) — President Bill Clinton Wednesday forecast a bigger-than-expected budget surplus of \$76 billion for the current fiscal year and vowed that political battles would not obstruct his economic agenda.

The surplus in fiscal 1999 would be the second in a row after nearly three decades of deficits, and the largest in history in dollar terms.

"I am proud to announce that we can say the era of big deficits is over. We are now entering the second year of an era of surpluses," Clinton said in announcing the surplus forecast at the White House.

He pledged to continue pursuing his economic agenda, topped by a financial overhaul of the Social Security retirement system, despite his impeachment trial in the Senate which begins Thursday.

"We cannot use anything as an excuse not to deal with our most pressing priorities. I do not intend to do it. I do not think the American people expect us to do it," he said.

The federal government in fiscal 1998 recorded a surplus of \$70 billion, its first

budget surplus in 29 years.

The new forecast by the White House budget office for fiscal 1999, which ends on Sept. 30, is an increase over the White House's initial projection in May of a \$54 billion surplus for 1999. The Congressional Budget Office in November projected a surplus of \$63 billion for fiscal 1999.

A White House official attributed the increased forecast to a "renewed strength in the economy." He said the U.S. economy slowed less than expected in the third and fourth quarters of 1998.

Clinton renewed his call for holding any budget surplus in reserve pending Social Security reform, a goal he aims to accomplish this year.

"Some say that this task will be too complicated for the Congress and the administration to achieve. That the will is too weak, the political system too divided. I do not agree with that," Clinton said.

"I heard that six years ago when I showed up here... And look at all that has happened in the last six years, by sustained

good-faith effort. I think that we will surprise the sceptics by dealing with the Social Security challenge over the next several months," he added.

The budget progress has provided "tangible benefits to millions of families," Clinton said. These included lower interest rates that increased home ownership and made purchases such as cars or college educations more affordable.

He also outlined other elements of his agenda, including reform in the Medicare health care programme for the elderly and education improvements, while maintaining budget discipline.

### Exchange Rates

Wednesday, 06-01-99

ACCESS 4646669

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	SAUDI RYAL	U.A.E. DIRHAM	OMAN RYAL	QATAR RYAL	KUWAIT DINAR	EGYPT POUND	LIBYAN LIRA	US DOLLAR	BRITISH STERLING	GERMAN MARK	SWITZERLAND FRA	FRANCE FRANC	JAPAN YEN	HOLLAND GUILDER	INDONESIA RUP	ITALY LIRA	BELGIUM FRANC	AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	CYPRUS POUND	AUSTRIA SCHILLING	CANADA DOLLAR	EURO
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1888	0.1927	1.8780	1.8389	0.1844	2.3475	0.2077	0.7080															
SAUDI RYAL	5.2977	1.0000	1.0211	9.9491	9.7421	1.0300	12.4363	1.1004	3.7508															
U.A.E. DIRHAM	6.1881	0.9793	1.0000	9.7432	9.5405	1.0087	12.1780	1.0778	3.6720															
BAHRAIN DINAR	0.52325	0.1005	0.1028	1.0000	0.9729	0.1028	1.2590	0.1105	0.3770															
OMAN RYAL	0.5438	0.1028	0.1048	1.0000	0.9729	0.1028	1.2590	0.1105	0.3770															
QATAR RYAL	9.1484	0.9708	0.9914	9.6592	9.4582	1.0000	12.0739	1.0883	3.6415															
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4280	0.0804	0.0821	0.8000	0.7834	0.0821	1.0000	0.0821	0.2745															
EGYPT POUND	4.1845	0.9088	0.9280	9.0416	8.8535	0.9280	11.3021	1.0000	3.4061															
LIBYAN LIRA	21.4831	0.40551	0.4108	40.3448	38.5055	0.4055	50.4510	0.4055	15.2100															
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2686	0.2722	2.6825	2.5973	0.2686	3.4054	0.2686	1.0000															
BRITISH STERLING	0.8548	0.1613	0.1648	1.6353	1.5719	0.1613	2.0066	0.1613	0.6052															
GERMAN MARK	2.3489	0.4434	0.4527	4.4111	4.3194	0.4434	5.6139	0.4434	1.6030															
SWITZERLAND FRA	1.9400	0.3662	0.3739	3.6432	3.5674	0.3662	4.5440	0.3662	1.3736															
FRANCE FRANC	7.6780	1.4870	1.5185	14.7947	14.4869	1.4870	18.4834	1.4870	6.5576															
JAPAN YEN	1.5881	0.3000	0.3063	2.9844	2.9223	0.3000	3.7304	0.3000	1.1251															
HOLLAND GUILDER	2.5485	0.4896	0.5101	4.8703	4.8069	0.4896	6.1239	0.4896	2.1836															
INDONESIA RUP	11.2884	2.1308	2.1758	21.1956	20.7584	2.1308	26.4993	2.1308	9.8922															
ITALY LIRA	23.2544	4.3895	4.4822	43.6714	42.7828	4.3895	54.5892	4.3895	18.4841															
BELGIUM FRANC	48.0062	9.2319	9.4289	91.8488	89.9379	9.2319	114.8110	9.2319	34.8270															
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	2.2893	0.4278	0.4398	4.2542	4.1857	0.4278	5.3178	0.4278	1.5000															
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	3.8884	0.7340	0.7485	7.3224	7.1808	0.7340	9.1280	0.7340	2.7630															
CYPRUS POUND	2.8836	0.5086	0.5173	5.0396	4.9348	0.5086	6.2997	0.5086	2.1800															
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	16.8780	3.1481	3.2148	31.3210	30.6693	3.1481	39.1512	3.1481	11.8080															
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1328	0.4026	0.4111	4.0053	3.9220	0.4026	5.0086	0.4026	1.5100															
EURO	1.2010	0.2287	0.2316	2.2955	2.2385	0.2287	2.8184	0.2287	0.8500															

### MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

NOTE: NEITHER ACCESS NOR THE PUBLISHER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY ERRORS OR MISTAKES

CURRENCY	1 JD	3 M	6 M	1 YEAR
US DOLLAR	5.2980	4.6700	4.7100	4.7100
BRITISH STERLING	6.2500	6.0800	6.7800	6.7800
FRANCE FRANC	3.1700	3.1000	3.0000	3.0000
GERMAN MARK	3.0000	3.0000	2.9800	2.9800
SWITZERLAND FRANC	1.3700	1.3700	1.3700	1.3700
JAPAN YEN	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

### CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN

CURRENCY	ASK	BID
US DOLLAR	0.1780	0.1780
BRITISH STERLING	1.7700	1.7700
GERMAN MARK	0.2047	0.2047
FRANCE FRANC	0.5140	0.5140
JAPAN YEN	0.6275	0.6275
HOLLAND GUILDER	0.3769	0.3769
ITALY LIRA	0.0428	0.0428
EURO	0.8307	0.8307

### WORLD STOCK MARKETS

STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST	CHANGE
FRANKFURT	DAX	5253.91	5253.91	1.55
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	8891.06	8891.07	81.88
LONDON	FT-SE 100	5882.20	5882.20	75.80
NEW YORK	DJ INDUSTRIAL	8911.19	8914.27	128.52
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	989.90	994.12	5.18
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	892.21	893.61	1.40
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1244.78	1252.10	16.32
TOKYO	NIKKEI-225	13486.49	13532.74	226.72
PARIS	CAC 40	4200.78	4147.50	53.28
FRANKFURT	COMMERZBANK	4661.28	4661.28	0.00

### PRECIOUS METALS

METAL	ASK	BID
GOLD	287.50	288.00
SILVER	5.05	5.00
PLATINUM	399.00	381.00

## Israel meets '98 budget deficit target

TEL AVIV (R) — Israel's budget deficit came in just under target last year thanks to an unexpectedly large injection of funds from Bank of Israel reserves, the Treasury said Wednesday.

The Treasury said preliminary figures showed that the deficit was 8.9 billion shekels (\$2.2 billion), or 2.4 per cent of gross domestic product and slightly less than the 9.2 billion shekels planned in the budget.

However, the domestic deficit ran well ahead of target, reaching 12.2 billion shekels versus a budgeted 8.4 billion.

The increase was offset by a foreign surplus of 3.3 billion shekels versus a budgeted 800 million shekel's deficit, the Treasury said in a statement.

"This surplus was due mainly to (the government's) receiving real profits from the Bank of Israel totalling 3.9 billion

shekels...because of the high levels of foreign reserves held by the State of Israel in foreign banks," the Treasury said.

It said the budget had assumed the central bank would transfer only 1.6 billion shekels.

Government revenues totalled 152.1 billion shekels, 10 billion less than forecast due to a sluggish Israeli economy, Treasury accountant-general Shy Talmon said.

But most of this was offset by spending that totalled 159.2 billion shekels (including credits granted) — seven billion less than budgeted.

"The finance ministry stresses that the increase in the domestic deficit came from the slowdown in the economic activities and therefore there is no reason to see this as a permanent increase in the deficit," the Treasury said.

The Central Bureau of Statistics said in a preliminary report last week that Israeli gross domestic product (GDP) would grow 1.9 per cent in 1998, compared with the 3.0 per cent originally forecast by the Treasury. Ministry officials said they expected final figures for 1998, which are not due to be published until March, would show GDP grew more than two per cent.

Talmon told Reuters that although the budget's components were way off the Treasury's forecast he did not view that as a serious problem.

"What's important is the bottom line. Its true there was a problem in forecasting income, but I hope this year we'll be closer," he said.

The government is committed by law to reducing the deficit to 2.0 per cent of GDP this

year, but most economists believe the Treasury's forecast of 2.0-2.5 per cent growth is optimistic.

The 1999 budget is stalled in parliament, where it has fallen victim to political squabbling inside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition. The government is meantime operating inside the 1998 budget framework.

The government financed its deficit by 5.1 billion shekels in privatization revenues, down from 8.5 billion shekels in 1997 before adjusting for inflation.

Another 4.5 billion shekels was raised in domestic borrowing while overseas there was net negative borrowing of 2.1 billion shekels. An increase in reserves held in banks added another 500 million shekels, the Treasury said.

## Oman vows to complete industrial projects

MUSCAT (AFP) — Omani Finance Minister Ahmad Ben Abdel Makki has vowed the sultanate would complete its planned industrial projects despite slashing its budget in the face of plummeting oil prices.

"We will continue the implementation of some development projects such as the construction of a refinery and the gas pipeline project," the minister said.

"The next years will see the realisation of these projects by Oman's private sector with a foreign participation not exceeding 49 per cent," the finance minister told AFP.

Included in the projects will be the Sohar port to the north of Muscat, whose construction "will commence during this year," he said.

### THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Formal arguments
- Full of complaints
- Impress greatly
- Natchez fort
- "Tom" singer
- Imbriculate
- Lastest of chess
- Clock thief's "big"
- Vegetable sphere
- Psychic's letters
- Oven function
- Quindien and Paquin
- Standing
- Uttered with hisses
- Sick
- Mill's location
- Vinoparator
- Angels' home
- Monothelistic religious group
- Baseball stat
- Urban abodes
- Fuse, as ones
- Juicy fruit
- Cool
- Sunglasses
- Oliver Stone film
- High mount
- Weight of bricks
- Surveying instrument
- Raise



## Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

### Government begins paying last cash subsidies

THE CASH subsidy covering sugar, rice and milk for the last quarter of 1998 will be the last as the government has ended all food subsidies as of the beginning of this year. The Ministry of Finance Monday began paying the cash subsidies for the last quarter of 1998 but Finance Minister Michel Maro told Al Ra'i: "We will stop paying cash subsidies which will be restricted to only those who benefit from the National Aid Fund."

### Number of companies registered during '98 decline by 4.5% and capital fall by 7.5%

A TOTAL of 4,097 companies capitalised at JD191.3 million was registered at the Ministry of Industry and Trade last year, the ministry's annual statistical directory showed. The number of companies was 4.6 per cent lower than the total in 1997 and the capital was less by 7.5 per cent as 4,294 companies capitalised at JD206.7 million were registered in 1997. In other words, the drop in the number of firms and capital was 197 entities and JD15.4 million respectively.

The annual statistical directory gave a breakdown of the types of companies registered last year by showing that four were public shareholding companies capitalised at JD60.6 million, 430 were limited liability companies capitalised at JD84.2 million, 3,254 were general partnership companies capitalised at JD39.8 million and 409 were limited partnership capitalised at JD6.6 million.

Amman took the lion's share in terms of the number of companies and the capital as 3,178 firms capitalised at JD326.1 million were registered in Amman. In Zarqa, 273 firms capitalised at JD6.6 million were registered and in Irbid the number was 312 companies with JD0.9 million in capital.

Broken down by sector, 387 companies capitalised at JD24.0 million were industrial compared to 306 firms with JD50.1 million capital registered in 1997. In the commercial and service sectors, the capital investments amounted to JD125.3 million and JD36.5 million respectively compared to JD84.2 million and JD69.1 million respectively in 1997.

The Arab share in the capital of the registered Jordanian companies amounted to JD8.2 million invested by 189 partners. The foreign share amounted to JD7.2 million was pumped by 69 foreign investors.

By nationality, the registered companies comprised 30 Syrians with JD1.1 million investments, seven Lebanese (JD0.3 million), 15 Egyptians (JD0.7 million), 73 Iraqis (JD2.9 million), four Kuwaitis (JD0.2 million), 14 Saudis (JD1.2 million) and eight Israelis who invested JD0.4 million.

During 1998, 11,526 sole proprietorships were registered with an overall capital of JD51.6 million. However, 3,138 sole proprietorships capitalised at JD23.0 million were liquidated. The number of liquidations among companies was 1,377 capitalised at JD15.1 million. 789 companies with JD176.9 million amended their capital.

Of the companies liquidated last year, nine capitalised at JD9 million were general partnership firms, 17 carrying a JD4.8 million capital were limited liability companies and 136 capitalised at JD1.3 million were limited partnership firms (Al Ra'i).

## Hyundai wins merged Semicon firm; S. Korea positions as market leader

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea's powerful Hyundai Group on Wednesday won a bitter battle to control a titanic new semiconductor firm, boosting Seoul's hopes for the domination of the world's microchip market.

The victory came after LG Group bowed to massive pressure to allow Hyundai Electronics Co. Ltd. to take controlling stake in a merger with microchip producer LG Semicon Ltd., apparently ending a months-old fight.

The firm will become the world's second biggest producer of memory chips after Japan's NEC Corp and bolster South Korea's global market share of almost 40 per cent.

But the sudden announcement of the deal by the office of President Kim Dae-Jung — which took even Hyundai executives by surprise — could embroil South Korea in major international trade and monopoly disputes, analysts warned.

"We will transfer all stakes in LG Semicon Ltd. to Hyundai Electronics Industries Co. Ltd.," Kang Yoo-Shik, head of the group's restructuring team, told reporters.

"Hyundai will take over LG Semicon's equity 100 per cent," he said, adding the decision was aimed at facilitating South Korea's corporate reform.

Hyundai executives said the firm would acquire 96 million of LG Semicon's 150 million shares, while LG said the deal would be worth far in excess of LG Semicon's equity valued at 1.3 trillion won (\$1.1 billion).

research and technology resources to keep pace with the rapidly advancing and highly competitive chip market.

"It will truly become the number one (microchip) producer in the world," Kim said, adding the deal would give Hyundai strong managerial power.

The deal could mean creditor banks may lift punitive financial sanctions slapped on LG Semicon two weeks ago in retaliation for its refusal to agree to the merger.

Kim Young-Hwan ruled out any massive layoffs as a result of the merger but indicated one or two lines could be closed "if the market situation gets worse."

But Hyundai's Kim dismissed any legal problems in the acquisition and worries about possible trade disputes with other countries.

"The combination of these companies is of overall benefit to everyone and contributes to a healthier situation. There is one less player which will probably reduce capacity and increase market shares," he said.

The deal would leave three major players on the world memory chip market, including NEC and South Korea's Samsung, giving the three enhanced powers control of world production and prices.

But analysts here raised worries the deal would spark trade repercussions from the United States and the European Union, already concerned about South Korea's domination of the sector amid charges over dumping.

A.F.M. TRADE Wednesday, 06-01-99

ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open Price	Close Price	Change
<b>BANKS</b>			
ARAB BK	213,500	217,000	+1.64%
NTL BK	1,540	1,540	0.00%
BL OF JO	1,270	1,270	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST BK	1,050	1,040	-0.95%
THE HOUSING BK	2,800	2,880	+2.86%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1,630	1,630	0.00%
JO. GULF BK	0,740	0,700	-5.41%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1,680	1,700	+1.19%
BEIT ALMAL	0,580	0,670	+1.47%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0,370	0,560	+1.75%
BANKS INDEX	284,940	point	+1.58%
<b>INSURANCE</b>			
JO. FRENCH INS	2,700	2,700	0.00%
JO. GULF INS	1,770	1,880	+5.08%
INSURANCE INDEX	128,650	point	+0.46%
<b>SERVICES</b>			
ELECTRIC POWER	1,710	1,720	+0.58%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0,800	0,800	0.00%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0,850	0,840	-1.18%
ARAB INTL FOR INVE.	1,330	1,340	+0.52%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1,170	1,160	-0.85%
SERVICES INDEX	111,200	point	+0.23%
<b>INDUSTRY</b>			
CEMENT	3,520	3,620	+2.84%
PHOSPHATE	1,750	1,770	+1.14%
ARAB POTASH	2,800	2,840	+1.43%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10,480	10,500	+0.19%
THE IND. COMML & AGRI	1,110	1,070	-3.60%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	2,810	2,810	0.00%
CECABIC IND	1,100	1,120	+1.82%
JO STEEL	2,850	2,900	+1.75%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1,240	1,240	0.00%
JO PIPES	1,080	1,090	+0.93%
DAR AL DAWA	5,400	5,420	+0.37%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0,550	0,570	+3.64%
JO STEEL	0,950	0,990	+4.21%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0,400	0,400	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1,280	1,280	0.00%
EL-ZAY	1,360	1,370	+0.74%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0,650	0,660	+1.54%
IND. RESOURCES	0,470	0,480	+2.13%
NEW CAPLES	0,610	0,620	+1.64%
NTL ALUMINUM	0,710	0,720	+1.41%
INDUSTRY INDEX	82,900	point	+2.33%
<b>PARALLEL</b>			
EXPORT BK (75	0,910	0,910	0.00%
AL TRADING FACILITIES	0,470	0,450	-4.26%
AL-BKAL	0,810	0,810	0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0,540	0,580	+7.41%
AL-SHARQ	1,050	1,080	+2.86%
AL DAWLAH	0,560	0,580	+3.57%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0,210	0,210	0.00%
OPTICAL & AURAL	0,480	0,450	-6.25%
READY MIX CONCRETE	0,850	0,830	-2.35%
NAMICO	0,260	0,260	0.00%
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0,240	0,250	+4.17%
MIDDLE EAST PHAR 80	0,580	0,600	+3.45%
AL-BKAL	0,540	0,540	0.00%
UNITED ENG. IND	0,210	0,210	0.00%
INTL CERAMIC	0,380	0,400	+5.26%
NUTRI DAR	0,660	0,680	+3.03%
ARAB JO. INVE	1,050	1,020	-2.86%
GRAND INDEX	174,74	point	+1.68%

## HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, THURSDAY 7, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

**ARIES:** (March 21 to April 19) Make sure everything is done perfectly today, because once you relax, it'll be hard to get back into the old routine. The party flag is up, but that's not all. You're in some sort of competition. You're advancing in your career and your social life at the same time. Interesting, but a tad dangerous. Don't make promises you can't keep.

**TAURUS:** (April 20 to May 20) You're in a playful mood today. Everybody around you benefits when you're happy. You bring them luck. And a friend is going to bring you some luck, too. All in all, a marvellous situation. This abundance could lead to complications, however. You're generating more work for yourself, possibly soon. People want what you're selling.

**GEMINI:** (May 21 to June 21) Put the finishing touches on a household project now. You'll have other things taking up your time and attention soon. There's a complication coming, possibly involving money. This just means you have to be a little more creative, that's all. You're creative anyway, so don't give it a second thought.

**CANCER:** (June 22 to July 21) Something at home has gotten uncomfortable, or will be tomorrow or the next day. Might as well do a little planning. You and your partner may disagree about specifics. That may be why you've avoided the issue, but it won't be possible for much longer. The good news is that you'll most likely have it resolved over the weekend.

**LEO:** (July 22 to August 21) Work requires your full attention today. Even if you have things running smoothly, watch for breakdowns. Abundance is wonderful, but it can lead to new dilemmas if you're not prepared. Communication is probably at the root of a problem; it's also your key to success. Make sure everybody knows what everybody else is doing. Don't make any assumptions.

**VIRGO:** (August 22 to September 22) Schedule your own time today, like you always do, but schedule everybody else's as well. That way you have a better chance of managing the entire group, and you all have a better chance of winning. You're good at this, so don't hold your talent back. Get in there and make their lives work for them, gently and supportively, of course.

**LIBRA:** (September 23 to October 22) If you tore things apart yesterday, now's the time to put them back together, better than ever. A little paint here, a little fluffed up pillow there, and suddenly you've got a completely new environment. You have a talent for decorating and you'll immediately see anything that's out of place. Shuffle things around until the ambience is exactly right.

**SCORPIO:** (October 23 to November 21) Looks like complications are going to arise late tonight or tomorrow. If you have most of the contingencies worked out ahead of time, that won't be a problem. Visualise yourself as already having won the game, then figure out how to get from here to there. It's a lot more fun to play the game that way.

**SAGITTARIUS:** (November 22 to December 21) If you can focus your attention just one more day, you'll be astonished at the results you produce. You could generate more income, as well as more status. You'd like to increase both freedom and security; that's also possible. You're creating the job of your dreams, simply by paying attention to details. That's today's assignment.

**CAPRICORN:** (December 22 to January 20) You're pushing yourself and succeeding, or you should be, because you've got everything you need. You're attracting the attention of higher-ups so just keep showing them that you are exactly what they want. You can produce results; that's the most important part. And you're a visionary. You're not only productive, you're also creative.

**AQUARIUS:** (January 21 to February 19) While you're going through your accounts, have you discovered a secret treasure trove? A way you can manage to have the vacation of your dreams? If not, keep looking. What's the point in getting your financial affairs in order if you can't also find a way to spend on something you'd like?

**PISCES:** (February 20 to March 20) Once you and your mate work out the details, you'll be able to make a bold move together. You've both been thinking about this, but neither of you could manage alone. Together, you've got more courage, determination and money. Once you know what you want, there will be no stopping you.

## JORDAN TIMES

TEL: 5684311-5699634

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## HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, FRIDAY 8, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

faith required. A person who knows you well thinks you can do it. Let that person convince you.

**VIRGO:** (August 22 to September 22) A person you care a lot about is always getting nice things for you, and today you could find the perfect thing for him or her. Don't worry whether there's an occasion for gift-giving. Just go ahead and get it. Finding the perfect thing is occasion enough.

**LIBRA:** (September 23 to October 22) Love is in the air, and you're generating it, but not all by yourself. There are other people out there who feel the same way. You encourage them, and they light you up. That's the key to a successful day, and you have everything you need to make it happen. You have friends. Let them know you appreciate their support.

**SCORPIO:** (October 23 to November 21) If you want to know something today, just ask. People will be willing to talk, especially if you provide them with a little security. Tell them what they say will be kept in confidence, then just gather up all the information they can pour into you. This is an excellent way of getting the advantage, and you are an expert at it.

JORDAN MARKETPLACE \*\*\* JORDAN MARKETPLACE \*\*\* JORDAN MARKETPLACE

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# Official backing given to Beijing's Olympic bid

BEIJING (AFP) — The Chinese Olympic Committee on Wednesday gave its official blessing to Beijing's bid to stage the 2008 Olympic Games.

The 75 members voted unanimously to back Beijing's bid which was announced on November 25, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Committee president Wu Shaozu said the committee and Beijing would jointly hand in the candidature papers to the International Olympic Committee in early February.

"The Olympic Games are the product of human civilization. An Oriental country with one quarter of the world population, China should make great contributions," said Wu.

"China should also have a chance to contribute to the Olympic movement. Hosting the Olympic Games will be beneficial to the exchange of western and eastern cultures and boost the global development of the Olympic move-

ment," he said.

Beijing Vice Mayor Liu Jingmin said his city would improve conditions to meet the standards of the IOC for staging the summer Olympics, Xinhua reported.

Beijing lost the 2000 Games to Sydney by just two votes. Although political reasons were widely blamed — including international concern after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre of pro-democracy students — pollution and other factors also counted against the Chinese capital.

The IOC will make a decision on the 2008 host in September 2001. Though Paris, Seville, Osaka, Kuala Lumpur, Istanbul, Toronto and Buenos Aires are also interested, the Chinese capital is already the hot favourite with most IOC members.

## Alami, Arazi win at Qatar Open

DOHA (AP) — Defending champion Petr Korda was eliminated Tuesday from the \$1 million Qatar Open, losing his first round match to Morocco's Karim Alami 6-7 (5-7), 6-2, 3-6.

The Czech, who came under the spotlight last month for testing positive for drugs at Wimbledon last year, was hoping to put all that behind him and retain his title.

Another favourite to clinch the title, Britain's Greg Rusedski, was eliminated by Germany's Bernd Karbacher.

Rusedski, seeded second, appeared to be heading to victory, winning the first set 6-4.

The German however fought back to win the next two sets 7-6 (7-1) and 6-3, to the dismay of the crowd, which was urging Rusedski on.

Seeded fifth here, Korda faced an energetic opponent who eliminated world number one Pete Sampras here in 1995.

The two players slugged it out in the first set, which Alami, who entered the tournament as a wild card, won in a tie-breaker.

Korda managed to stay in the match, winning the second set 6-2, but the Moroccan capitalised on Korda's lapse in concentration to clinch the match in two hours and 15 minutes.

"I don't feel guilty because I didn't do anything. I didn't come here to prove my innocence because I am innocent," Korda said after the match.

"I don't know if I'm going to take part in the Australian Open. All I know now is that I'm going to take some time to think," he said.

Having won the first set and leading 5-4 in the second, Rusedski failed to convert either of his two match points and allowed the German to win the match with his accurate serves and concentration.



Karim Alami of Morocco returns to Czech Petr Korda during their Qatar Open ATP tour match in Doha. Korda said he was ready to retire after Alami defeated him in a tense three hour battle, 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-3 (AFP photo)



Hicham Arazi of Morocco returns the ball to his opponent Marat Safin of Russia during their Qatar Open ATP tour match in Doha. Arazi won 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) (AFP photo)

## Davenport hopes for link-up with Boris

BERLIN (AFP) — World No. 1 Lindsay Davenport has set her heart on a mixed doubles partnership at Wimbledon with Germany's former men's singles champion Boris Becker — one of the biggest crowd pleasers of the modern era at the All England Club.

Davenport dreams of a showdown with another potential dream team of two more Wimbledon legends, America's three-time former champion John McEnroe and Germany's seven-time women's champion Steffi Graf.

Davenport told German daily paper Die Welt on Wednesday: "It would be fantastic. We would turn the doubles tournament into a great event."

The American said she was only waiting for a phone call from Becker and reckoned it would be a great way for the German, men's champion in 1985, 1986 and 1989, to bring down the curtain on his Wimbledon career.

She said: "With a victory at Wimbledon he could say bye-bye."

Becker played his last singles match at the All England club in 1997, telling his conqueror Pete Sampras at the net when they shook hands that it was his last game at Wimbledon. He later confirmed the news to journalists.

He was a VIP guest at the 1998 tournament, also finding time for some television commentary work.

McEnroe has already confirmed his interest in Graf's suggestion that they should form a doubles team for the Wimbledon and U.S. Open championships in 1999.

Davenport also said she believed that Graf's Grand Slam winning days are not necessarily over despite the personal and fitness worries that have plagued the German in recent years and the emergence of a new generation of stars such as Martina Hingis, Venus Williams and Davenport herself.

Davenport said: "If she (Graf) stays in good health she could win the Australian Open."

## IOC's Samaranch admits receiving gifts

LAUSANNE (AFP) — The chairman of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Juan Antonio Samaranch, has admitted accepting a gift of two firearms from Salt Lake City before the capital of Utah was awarded the 2002 Winter Games.

But Samaranch has denied any wrongdoing, claiming exemption from the rules governing other members of the committee.

IOC rules forbid members of the panel that selects host cities to accept gifts worth more than \$150 but Samaranch maintained that, since he did not take part in the vote, that there was no reason to prevent him from taking the firearms, valued in total at just less than \$1,000.

Samaranch told Swiss daily paper "24 heures": "I did receive two firearms as a gift, the arms in question being a 22 Long rifle and a Browning. I did not want to refuse these presents. Because in these towns, arms are part of a certain tradition. To refuse them would have been an out-

rage.

"These gifts, as IOC internal rules demand, were registered and can be found in the office of the bureau of the institution in Lausanne."

"It's true that members of the jury choosing the host cities don't have the right to accept gifts worth more than \$150, but this rule does not apply to me as I don't take part in the elections."

Samaranch and his wife, Maria Teresa Salisachs-Rowe, also received a native Indian headdress and a quilt, valued at between \$1,000 and \$5,000.

The Salt Lake City organisers have admitted giving scholarships and other benefits to IOC officials and are the subject of probes from the IOC, the United States Olympic Committee, the FBI and their own ethical committee.

Samaranch had previously vowed to purge the IOC of corrupt officials and launched a probe into the allegations arising from the successful Salt Lake City bid.

The Salt Lake City committee purchased \$10,000

worth of rifles wholesale to support their bid.

Browning vice-President Rich Bauter had described the guns given to Samaranch as a "Gold" — a semi-automatic hunting rifle — and a "Euro Bolt". Bauter described the arms as "nothing too expensive or too dear".

Ironically, if Samaranch emerges unscathed from the guns row, his position could be strengthened as he has proposed that future decisions on host cities be made by an 11-man board rather than the 115 members, who currently vote.

This board, seen as friendly to Samaranch, would then have the power to nominate new IOC members.

Samaranch made the proposals following the allegations that have plagued the IOC since the Salt Lake City bid.

## Tyson talks tough before comeback

LAS VEGAS (AFP) — Mike Tyson, facing a possible return to prison on assault charges, expects little from South Africa's Francois Botha when the two former heavyweight champions fight here January 16.

"Absolutely, I am going right at him and I expect him to go down cold. I expect him to die," Tyson said.

The scheduled 10-round bout is Tyson's first fight since Nevada boxing officials reinstated him last August after banishing him from the sport in 1997 for biting Evander Holyfield's ears in their title bout here.

Tyson's ring return might be short-lived, however.

Tyson pleaded "no contest" on assault charges stemming from an August traffic accident in Maryland and faces up to 20 years in prison plus a \$5,000 fine.

Asked if he thought he would be able to avoid trouble that long, Tyson said, "I don't know anybody who stays out of trouble for 20 years. I may not live for 20 years."

Sentencing is set for late January or early February and the outcome could affect whether Tyson is forced to serve another seven years for a prior rape conviction.

Indiana judge Patricia Gifford is waiting for a Maryland court to act before ruling on whether or not Tyson's actions violated his probation. Tyson was released after serving three years of a 10-year rape sentence.

Tyson was subdued with short answers during an interview session Tuesday but ended with an obscenity-filled rant, saying, "My credibility is shot" and criticizing past court adversaries.

The uncertainty has clouded Tyson's boxing future, but a fit and prime Tyson who escapes a return to prison would threaten March's unification title fight winner, Evander Holyfield or Lennox Lewis.

"It is one fight at a time, one fight at a time," said Tyson. "Let's just get through this one, then I will answer questions about the next."

Tyson, 45-3 with 39 knockouts, is trying to recapture the glory days of a decade ago in training to battle Botha, 39-1 with 24 knockouts.

"I'm working hard on body punches, combinations, the basics," Tyson said. "We are still being very explosive, but also working on some basic things and more or less focus on trying to use them more and not be so hesitant as I have in the past and not totally rely on power like I did in the past."

Tyson, 32, has a new trainer in Tommy Brooks, who claimed his fighter had already sparred 372 rounds in preparation for Botha.

"We are trying to get him to fight like he did before when he won the title when he was 24," Brooks said. "We're in shape to go 10 rounds, although I don't think it will go that far."

## NBA players gather for vote

NEW YORK (AFP) — Locked out National Basketball Association players began gathering for their vote Wednesday on whether or not to take the owners' final offer or risk having no season at all.

"We want some things that are fair for us. These things are not fair for us," said Atlanta center Dikembe Mutombo, one of 19 players on the union negotiation panel who unanimously suggest players reject the deal.

NBA Commissioner David Stern has said that unless players make major changes to their final offer, he will suggest to owners at their meeting here Thursday that the 1998-99 season be canceled.

So far, that threat has not broken the will of the union.

"We're unified. I know that," Miami center Alonzo Mourning said. "That's the only thing that counts with myself and the union."

Added Atlanta's Steve Smith, also on the union negotiating committee, "We want to get out the message we don't think the deal is good for us."

The vote will be open, meaning anyone who disagrees with those in support of the

measure must make known their position.

Utah's Karl Malone, Kevin Willis of Toronto and Ben Wallace of Washington are among those who want to accept the owners' offer.

"I would accept it," Wallace said. "If you want to look at it from a win-loss position, the owners have won. I would vote for it."

"Let's get it done and start playing. That's what everybody really wants to do. That's what everybody is talking about."

Wallace is like many who make up the NBA majority, a non-star whose \$26,700-dollars salary from last season is a pittance compared to the \$100 million deals of teammate Juwan Howard and Minnesota's Kevin Garnett.

What some fear, however, is that caving in now will be costly later.

"Their platform is to take any possible leverage away from any player in any possible negotiation," NBA veteran Dan Schayes said of the owners.

## Orioles get permission to play in Cuba

BALTIMORE (AFP) — Cuban President Fidel Castro might be able to see his dream of Major League Baseball come true.

The U.S. State Department granted permission for the Baltimore Orioles to play an exhibition game against the Cuban national team in Cuba.

"The granting of the license is the first positive step in a process which the Orioles initiated more than two years ago," Orioles owner Peter Angelos said. "The Orioles will continue to work with Commissioner (Bud) Selig in the forthcoming negotiations."

If talks are productive, the Orioles want to follow their trip to Havana with a game here at Camden Yards against the Cuban team, the reigning Olympic champions.

The government approval came as U.S. President Bill Clinton announced easing of trade restrictions on the Communist island nation,

which had been banned from U.S. deals since 1962.

Cuban defectors have contributed to the past two World Series championship teams.

Livan Hernandez was the Most Valuable Player in the 1997 World Series triumph of the Florida Marlins, prompting his brother Orlando to defect. Orlando signed with the New York Yankees, who won last year's crown.

The Orioles might be the perfect team to make the trip. They have no Cuban players but field an impressive roster, rebuilt since the end of last season.

Baltimore features all-time consecutive games streak-setter Cal Ripken and slugger Albert Belle in one of the game's richest lineups.

They would face a Cuban team that has remained loyal to its homeland in the wake of defections of big-money contracts, players whose patriotism has

inspired an exception domination of the amateur ranks.

"Baseball is a wonderful medium in bringing people together," Angelos said. "This has been demonstrated time and again in a variety of contexts. In that spirit, the Orioles welcome the opportunity to play a part in the effort to improve relations between the two peoples."

The Orioles are expected to send a group to Cuba as quickly as this week to arrange for a two-game series, which newspaper reports said would be allowed only if proceeds go to humanitarian aid for Cubans and not the Castro regime.

Baltimore mayor Kurt Schmoke suggested sending the Orioles to Cuba after a visit to the island last March.

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## Pierce through to hardcourt quarters

**GOLD COAST (AFP)** — Mary Pierce returned from a six-week lay-off to cruise into the quarterfinals of the Australian women's hardcourt championship here on Wednesday.

The former Australian Open champion crushed defeated Argentinean qualifier Ines Gorrochategui, 6-2, 6-2.

Despite the ease of her win, the French world No. 7 was not satisfied with her first hit-out since the Chase Championships in New York last November.

"I wouldn't say I was happy with the way I was playing. I was happy that I won my first match," Pierce said. "I have some things to work on."

Despite Pierce's self-criticism, she displayed all of her customary baseline forehand power to leave Gorrochategui with few answers.

Pierce will meet world No. 50 and countrywoman Nathalie Dechy in Thursday's quarter-finals of the AS275,000 (\$170,500) event at the Hope Island Tennis Club.

Dechy eliminated Russian seventh seed Elena Likhovtseva, 6-4, 3-6, 7-5. Likhovtseva was the second seeded player eliminated, along with eighth seed Henrietta Nagyova of Slovakia, who was beaten Tuesday.

Second seed Patty Schnyder of Switzerland also made her 1999 debut Wednesday with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Wang Shi-ting of Chinese Taipei.

Schnyder, who improved her ranking last year from 26 to 11, admitted she was nervous but pleased with the win after having a substantial break from the game.

The 20-year-old won five titles last year with her run beginning with the Tasmanian International in Hobart.

"I lost a close match here in the second round last year and then I went to Hobart and won match after match and it gave me a lot of confidence," Schnyder said.

Schnyder will play Spain's Magui Serna, who defeated Romania's Ruxandra Dragomir 6-3, 6-4.

In the day's closest match, fifth seed Anne-Gaëlle Sidot.

Huber, ranked 21 in the world, won 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 after being down a service break in the eighth game of the third set and will now play third-seeded Romanian Irina Spîrlea, who defeated Israel's Anna Smashnova.

Defending champion Ai Sugiyama of Japan, who defeated Sarah Pitkowski of France 6-4, 7-5, will play American qualifier Brie Rippner, who ousted Kveta Hrdlickova of the Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-1.



Fifteen-year-old Australian Jelena Dokic plays a forehand return during her win over Arantxa Sanchez Vicario of Spain at the Hopman Cup in Perth. Dokic, the current world junior girls No. 1, defeated World No. 4 Sanchez Vicario 6-3, 6-2 (AFP photo)

## Teenager sends Spain crashing to 2nd Hopman Cup defeat

**PERTH (AFP)** — Fifteen-year-old Australian Jelena Dokic beat world number four Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, as favourites Spain crashed to a second straight defeat at the Hopman Cup on Wednesday.

Dokic, the world junior number one but ranked only 341 in the seniors, beat the French Open champion 6-3, 6-2.

Spain's fate was sealed when Australian power-server Mark Philippoussis beat men's world number five Carlos Moya, the reigning men's French Open title holder, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7).

The Spaniards forfeited the mixed doubles because Moya has influenza, but after their defeat to France in their first match, the number one seeds can no longer reach the final of the \$550,000 mixed team tournament.

In front of a packed 7,000 crowd at the Burswood Dome, Dokic brilliantly made amends for her 6-1, 6-0 defeat by South Africa's Amanda Coetzer three days ago.

"It hasn't really sunk in yet. This is the biggest win of my career. I was more relaxed, not as nervous and played smarter than the other day when I lost to Amanda Coetzer."

"I was surprised by the way I dominated the match. I have never before played in front of a crowd this big. I knew I was up against a great player and had nothing to lose — so I just went for it."

Sanchez had a minor knee problem but said that was not an excuse for the biggest upset of her career.

"She went for her shots and did very well. I gave her a lot of free points, but she still played well."

"I am not 100 per cent at the beginning of the year — I know I can play much better."

Philippoussis paid tribute to his young partner.

"It was unbelievable watching her," he said. "Some of her shots were just great. She is a great little girl. She is definitely going to be a very good player."

But he made a plea for her not to be swamped by commercial interests. "Leave her alone," he urged. "She is enjoying herself out there. I suppose there will be agents running after her."

"But she is out there for the fun of it. Give her space."

It was the third time in three meetings that Philippoussis had beaten Moya, despite the Spaniard's higher ranking.

"I just seem to play extremely tough against Carlos," Philippoussis said. "Spain have one more tie against South Africa on Thursday but it will have more importance for the South Africans."



Mark Philippoussis of Australia watches his serve to Carlos Moya of Spain during their singles match at the Hopman Cup in Perth. Philippoussis defeated Moya 6-4, 7-6 (9/7) (AFP photo)

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All players will play at least three matches in the round-robin event which starts next Wednesday.

## Graf dismisses retirement talk

**HONG KONG (AFP)** — Steffi Graf dismissed speculation of her retirement on Wednesday and said she has set her sights on adding to the 21 Grand Slam titles amassed during her glittering 17-year career.

The 29-year-old German legend, in Hong Kong for an exhibition event, rejected talk of retirement and said her series of lengthy injury lay-offs had rekindled her love for tennis.

Asked if she was aware of rumours she may retire, Graf, who has won more than 100 singles titles since turning professional in 1982, said: "I haven't heard that. It's not true. It's news to me. I still love the game very much."

Now fully recovered from an injury

to her right wrist which interrupted her season last year, Graf is looking forward to the buzz of taking part in Grand Slam events in 1999.

"It's always a challenge for me to go out there. And if I look back at the last few tournaments I played at the end of last season it was a thrill to be out on the court playing well, playing the top players, to feel the crowd behind me."

"I still enjoy it so much. That's why I'm still around," she added.

"After the operation on my knee in 1997 I was out for something like five months. At first I didn't miss playing that much because it was nice to have some time away with friends, but when I started playing again I realised how much it meant to me, and how

much I enjoy playing," Graf told AFP.

Graf joins American stars Venus and Serena Williams and Russia's Anna Kournikova in the eight-player Hong Kong event before heading to Australia next week.

"This is just a good opportunity for me to get some match practice. Last year was a difficult year but I couldn't have ended better, winning two tournaments in a row and getting to the semis of another...that made up for a lot," she said.

"This year my focus is going to be the Grand Slams again. I want to concentrate on preparing well because I still feel I am capable of doing well in those tournaments," Graf added.

## Chang to play in Kooyong Classic

**ADELAIDE (AFP)** — Michael Chang said Wednesday he would accept an invitation to play in next week's Kooyong Classic in Melbourne after losing early in the Australian Hardcourt Championship here.

The American, whose ranking slumped to 29 after an injury-plagued 1998, said he needed the extra match practice in the lead-up to the Australian Open later this month after being beaten 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) by Australian Scott Draper in the second round.

"Now I need a few more matches, the Kooyong Classic will help me in that aspect and I will be able to play some good tennis," he said.

"I have got next week to play three good matches and get some good preparation."

Chang, a three-time Kooyong Classic winner, took up his option as first alternate for the event following the withdrawal of world number one Pete Sampras last weekend.

Chang said his loss to Draper at this early stage of the year did not give him any cause to doubt his ability to get back up near the top of the world rankings this year.

"It's not too much of a setback," he said. "It would have been nice to do well here and get some confidence going, but it's the first tournament of the year and it has been a while for most players."

"Match practice is going to be crucial in the lead-up to the Australian Open and I would have loved to have played some more matches here and done well. It's never fun losing."

Chang said earlier this week he had set himself four goals for 1999 — to become No. 1 and to win the three grand slam tournaments he is yet to win.

The 1989 French Open champion will join Andre Agassi, Tim Henman, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Goran Ivanisevic, Petr Korda, Mark Philippoussis and Thomas Enqvist in the eight-man Kooyong field.

All players will play at least three matches in the round-robin event which starts next Wednesday.

## LOCAL SPORTS SCENE

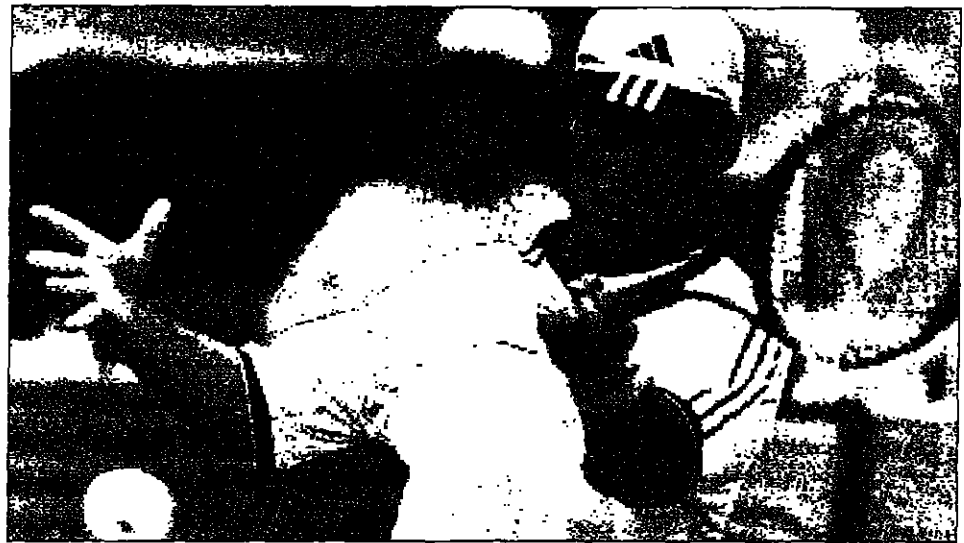


### Four countries confirmed for handball tournament

**AMMAN** — Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Croatia have confirmed their participation in Al Hassan International Handball Championship, which will be held under the patronage of HRH Princess Rahma between March 14-20. Meanwhile, a Croatian coach will arrive in Amman today to start training the national handball teams.

### Handball federation bids for 3 Asian events

**AMMAN** — The Jordan Handball Federation (JHF) will contact the Asian Federation to host three championships, including the League Champions tournaments for women and youth teams as well as the West Asian qualifiers for the World Cup. Meanwhile, the JHF announced that players registration for the 1999 season will be held throughout February, while transfers will be limited to March 1-15.



Scott Draper

## Draper ousts Chang in Adelaide

**ADELAIDE (AFP)** — Australian Scott Draper bounced former world number two Michael Chang out of the Australian Hardcourt Tennis Championship here late Wednesday.

Draper mixed unbeatable shot-making for most of the match with a concentration lapse late in the second set before beating sixth-seeded Chang 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) in a second-round match.

The Queenslander was in command in the first set with solid all-court tennis in windy conditions and then grew in confidence and aggression to take five straight games and a 5-1 lead in the second set.

But serving for victory at 5-2 he gave Chang a sniff with baseline errors.

Chang grabbed the chance to break back twice and win the next four games before Draper man-

aged to hold his serve and force a tiebreaker.

Down three set points at 6-3 in the tiebreaker, Draper then dug deep to reel off five straight points to seal the match.

Before his loss, Chang confirmed he would replace World No. 1 Pete Sampras in the Kooyong Classic in Melbourne next week after Sampras withdrew because of fatigue.

Draper will now play compatriot Michael Tebbutt in the quarterfinals after the 122nd-ranked Australian, who received a last-minute wildcard into the event, eliminated 1997 French Open winner Gustavo Kuerten, 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/3).

Tebbutt's victory over the World No. 23 Brazilian was his biggest scalp since he beat Spain's Albert Costa in Sydney last January.

Earlier in the day, second seed Thomas Enqvist of Sweden took advantage of a rest day to post a quick-fire 6-2, 6-3 win over German David Prinosil.

He will play Slovakian Dominik Hrbaty in the quarterfinals after Hrbaty was awarded his second-round match when German qualifier Oliver Gross withdrew with a lower back injury.

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## SPORTS IN BRIEF

### Moroccan signs deal with Dutch club

**THE HAGUE (AFP)** — Moroccan international Abdelkrim El Hadrioui on Wednesday signed a contract that will link him to Dutch first division club AZ Alkmaar until the end of the 2003-2004 season. Left back El Hadrioui has made 60 appearances for his national team despite being only 26. He previously played for Portuguese club Benfica. Another Dutch club, NAC Breda, have, meanwhile, abandoned plans to sign Belgian striker David Paas from Portuguese side Vitoria Guimaraes, citing a failure to reach agreement on terms.

### Di Canio's agent threatens Wednesday

**SHEFFIELD (AFP)** — The agent of controversial Italian Paolo Di Canio on Wednesday threatened to shame Sheffield Wednesday into meeting the player for showdown talks. Di Canio, currently in Italy, has outlined a letter listing his gripes with the English Premiership club and says he will make it public unless club officials agree to meet him. Among Di Canio's arguments are that the club did not support him sufficiently when he was banned for 11 matches

and fined 10,000 pounds for pushing referee Paul Alcock during an English Premiership match against Arsenal last September. The player's agent, Moreno Roggi, said: "We would much rather meet face to face and thrash things out than release the contents of the letter. 'Paolo feels he has not been treated appropriately or adequately protected by the club. He wants the supporters to know this situation is not of his making and would like the opportunity to explain everything to them.'" Roggi told The Daily Mail.

### Atkinson considering Forest deal

**NOTTINGHAM (AFP)** — Veteran manager Ron Atkinson said Wednesday that he is considering an offer to take charge of English Premier League strugglers Nottingham Forest. Forest on Tuesday sacked manager Dave Bassett after a run of 17 straight league matches without a win and an FA Cup loss to Portsmouth. "Nottingham Forest have approached me and I agreed that I would consider their offer," said Atkinson, who is currently vacationing in the Caribbean. "I will let them know my offer within the next week." Atkinson, 59, has previously been manager at clubs including Manchester United, Aston Villa and Sheffield Wednesday.

### Meola to rejoin U.S. team

**ORLANDO (AFP)** — Tony Meola, the former United States World Cup goalkeeper who was dropped after 1994, will join the U.S. team when training camp begins here Saturday. The MetroStars neominder made 89 appearances with the national team, the most by any goalkeeper, from 1998 to 1994 and played in the 1990 and 1994 World Cup finals before an ill-fated flirtation with U.S. football. Meola, 29, will rejoin coach Bruce Arena, for whom he played at the University of Virginia. Meola won the Hermann Trophy as the best U.S. college player and helped the Cavaliers to a 1989 national crown. "I'm very excited and thankful to Bruce Arena for giving me another chance to play for the national team," said Meola. "I'm going to camp and will do my best to contribute to the team." The U.S. team will train through January 19 for friendly matches at Bolivia in January and in February against Germany in Jacksonville, Florida, and against Chile in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "Tony has demonstrated that he's a top player in MLS and he deserves another opportunity with the national team," Arena said. "But like every other player being called in, he will have to prove himself."



## Butler, U.N. deny Iraq inspectors were spying

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler denied on Wednesday that the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) in charge of dismantling Iraq spied for anyone, while a U.N. spokesman said Secretary-General Kofi Annan had "no evidence of any kind" for such allegations.

They were reacting to reports by two U.S. newspapers that the United States tapped some of Iraq's most secret communications by using intelligence gathered by Butler's weapons teams.

But the reports fuelled an ongoing debate on the future of UNSCOM at the United Nations, where Russia, China and France — Security Council members sympathetic to Iraq — have long wanted the commission to be restructured and have heaped criticism on Butler.

A report by Butler last month that Baghdad had failed to resume full cooperation with UNSCOM prompted the withdrawal of U.N. weapons teams from Iraq and four days of air strikes by United States and British warplanes and cruise missiles.

Butler told reporters: "We have never conducted spying for anybody... Have we facilitated spying? Are we spies? Absolutely not," he said. "Don't believe everything you read in print. There is much in those articles which is wrong."

The Washington Post had reported that Annan had convincing evidence that U.N. arms inspectors helped collect eavesdropping intelligence

## U.N. insists Iraq cannot evict U.S., British aid staff

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Rejecting Baghdad's request to evict 14 American and British U.N. relief workers, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has told Iraq that he alone has the right to determine who works on U.N. projects.

In a note sent to Iraq's U.N. mission by his legal counsel, Hans Corell on Tuesday, the United Nations brushed aside Iraq's assertion that it could not protect American and British U.N. staff because of popular anger after last month's air strikes. No one knows how far the United Nations will go if the 14 do not get their visas renewed or whether Iraq will follow through with its directives. But Baghdad, diplomats said, would receive little sympathy for confronting Annan on an issue as basic as selecting aid workers.

"The [U.N.] secretariat is not in a position to accede to the request to replace the personnel in question on grounds of their nationality," said Corell's note to Iraq.

used in U.S. efforts to undermine the Iraqi regime.

The Boston Globe said U.S. intelligence agents were able to listen in on secret communications between elite military units responsible for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's security.

Annan's spokesman, Fred Eckhard, said: "We not only have no convincing evidence of these allegations, we have no evidence of any kind. We have only rumours. Neither the secretary-general nor any member of his staff has access to classified U.S. intelligence, although UNSCOM does."

Eckhard said Annan "rejects the characterisation of his state of mind attributed to so-called 'confidants', such as that he is convinced of things, aware of facts, and so on."

"Obviously, were these

charges true, it would be damaging to the United Nations' disarmament work in Iraq and elsewhere," Eckhard said, adding that Annan knew little about the day-to-day operations of UNSCOM, which is a subsidiary of the Security Council. He said Annan had been aware for some time that a number of journalists had been "pursuing this story."

"When he first heard of these allegations, he asked UNSCOM's executive chairman... about them. Ambassador Butler categorically denied them."

Denying that Annan was trying to pressure Butler to resign, Eckhard said: "This is not so. In any case, the issue is not the executive chairman; it is how to get on with the work of dismantling Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction."



Overhead view of the rally cars in the Mauritanian desert for the 5th stage of the Dakar rally between Bir Mogrein and Atar in Mauritania on Tuesday. The race will end Jan. 17 in Dakar, Senegal. (AP photo)

## Yemen asks two British detectives probing botched rescue attempt to leave Aden

SANAA (R) — Two British detectives probing a rescue operation in Yemen in which four Western hostages were killed left Aden on Wednesday at the request of Yemeni authorities, a Western diplomat said.

"We were surprised when security authorities [in Aden] asked the two men to leave to Sanaa," the diplomat told Reuters.

He said the two agents left for the Yemeni capital to join two other colleagues already there. The detectives were expected to hold talks with senior Yemeni officials including

the interior minister, the diplomat added.

It was not immediately clear why the two detectives were asked to leave the port city.

But Yemen's Interior Minister Hussein Mohammad Arab said on Tuesday that the presence of British and American investigators in Yemen was "only for them to look at the results of the probe and not to participate in the investigations by Yemeni security authorities."

The diplomat said the two detectives, who had arrived in Aden on Tuesday, met officials

there.

"They had a good meeting with the governor [of Aden] who offered them help and cooperation," he said.

A 10-man FBI team and the four British detectives arrived in Yemen last week to probe the rescue bid in which three Britons and one Australian died. Another Briton and an American were injured in the raid.

The victims were among 16 Western tourists taken hostage by Islamic militants.

A little-known guerrilla group calling itself the

Aden-Abyan Islamic Army claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and blamed Sanaa for the hostage deaths.

Britain twice summoned Yemen's ambassador to London last week to express dissatisfaction for allegedly not having received a full account of the raid.

Yemen has insisted that its forces had to go in because the kidnappers had started killing the hostages. But some hostages have said they were used by the kidnappers as human shields as Yemeni forces moved forward.

## Kuwaiti Islamist parliamentarians want flogging, amputation, stoning

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — A group of parliamentarians has called for the Islamic punishments of flogging, amputation and stoning to be introduced to Kuwait, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

Under their proposed 280-article bill, adulterers charged after testimony of four male witnesses or a confession would be given 100 lashes, Al Rai Al Aam said.

Rapists would also face 100 lashes as well as a minimum 10-year jail term, which would be increased to a death sen-

tence or life prison term if the victim was less than seven years old, mentally retarded, a relative or a maid.

Thieves in this oil-rich emirate who steal more than the equivalent value of 17 grammes of gold from people other than relatives would have their right hand amputated, after a thorough medical examination.

Abortion is classified under premeditated murder in the bill, and would be punishable by the death penalty, while sodomy carries 40 lashes and a jail term.

Drinking alcohol similarly carries 40 lashes, but defecation 80 lashes.

Converts from Islam would have only 30 days to repent and revert to their religion or face being sentenced to death in all but exceptional cases, as Islam does not allow its followers to convert.

The bill submitted to Kuwait's parliament follows a concerted campaign by Islamist members of parliament led by Walid Al Tabtabai, a former university Islamic Sharia law professor, to "clean up" Kuwait.

Parliament unanimously rejected in November a proposal by Tabtabai, member of a strict Islamist party, for a ban on cinema, theatre and "entertainment tents" during the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk.

Kuwait remains a religiously conservative country, where alcohol is banned and which has no discos. But is the only Gulf Arab state to have an elected parliament, although women are not allowed to vote.



## Mayor gives bikes to reduce pollution

BORDEAUX (AP) — Life for city officials in Bordeaux became a little less cushy Monday when the mayor put 20 bicycles at their disposal in an effort to reduce pollution. "Very often, elected officials or bureaucrats get around Bordeaux by car. They contribute to increasing pollution," said Alain Juppé, a former prime minister who is now mayor of Bordeaux. Juppé told a news conference the bikes would be available in the courtyard of the mayor's office for the officials to use while carrying out their duties. "It's an experiment. If it's conclusive, we will give other personnel 'municipal bikes'," said Juppé.

## Morgue hires freezer trailer to handle bodies

LONDON (R) — A British hospital said on Tuesday it had been forced to hire a refrigerated trailer to store bodies because its morgue was overflowing with the victims of a flu epidemic. A spokesman for the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital in eastern England said the trailer, which could store 36 bodies, had been parked at the back of the 80-space mortuary. "It's the first time we've had to do this. We still hope it will be a temporary move but we can't say for sure how long it will last," said the spokesman.

## Priest finds gun, grenade in confessional

BUSTO ARSIZIO (AP) — Someone in a little town in northern Italy hit on an unusual way to get rid of grandpa's old war souvenirs: They left them in a church confessional. A priest in Busto Arsizio found the live grenade and pistol wrapped in rags and plastic stashed in a confessional at the Basilica di San Giovanni while making his nightly rounds, the ANSA news agency said Tuesday. Attached was an anonymous note saying "Danger" that explained the provenance of the weapons. ANSA said police were summoned to haul away and destroy the gun and the grenade, which were in perfect working order.

## Prostitution moves off Sweden's streets

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — A new law that has made it a criminal offence to buy sexual services in Sweden appears to have cleared prostitutes off the country's streets and sent them over to Denmark, press reports said Monday. The law, which went into force on Jan. 1, is aimed at protecting women by punishing those who try to buy sex with either fines or up to six months in prison. The measure, approved by parliament in a 181 to 92 vote, punishes the demand rather than the supply. It does not ban prostitution — sex workers are free to continue to offer their services unhindered.

## Arrested man confesses to state agency cars theft

ATHENS (AP) — A man arrested on suspicion of stealing an anti-terrorist police car has confessed to involvement in the theft of another 150 state cars, police sources said Tuesday. The man, who police initially identified only as a 35-year-old from an Ionian island, was arrested in the western port of Patras. Authorities did not give a date for the arrest. The unmarked anti-terrorist police car was stolen in Athens last month while parked near a police station, media reports said. According to authorities, police were searching for possible accomplices and also for the 150 cars allegedly stolen from various state agencies and services.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Turkey gives tacit support to Kurdish TV

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey implicitly gave its support Wednesday to a new Kurdish television station the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is planning to set up in northern Iraq. "This is a private sector initiative, we see it in that context," Foreign Ministry spokesman Necati Utkan told reporters here. Several Turkish journalists are involved in the project to set up the new Kurdish television channel, whose broadcasts will also be receivable in the predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces of Turkey. "There is no official Turkish contribution to this project, there is no question of it," Utkan added. The new channel, which is to broadcast from Salahuddin in northern Iraq, could offer Kurdish viewers an alternative to Med-TV, a private Kurdish channel broadcasting from London.

#### Florida abortion clinic sues AOL

MELBOURNE (R) — The owner of a Florida abortion clinic has sued CompuServe and America Online Inc., alleging abortion opponents used online connections to track down and harass abortion doctors and patients, an attorney for the clinic said Wednesday. Attorney Roy Lucas, who represents Patricia Windle, owner of Aware Woman Clinic, said members of the group Christians for Life used CompuServe "to build a large blackmail database that filled 15 ringed binders." America Online, the nation's largest online service, was named in the suit because it owns CompuServe. Also named were 15 members of Christians for Life, based in Melbourne, Florida.

#### Prince bandar considering visit to Libya

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, is considering visiting Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi in an effort to persuade him to surrender two suspects accused of the 1988 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, diplomats said on Tuesday. Bandar last week had asked the Security Council's sanctions committee for permission to fly to Tripoli on Jan. 5 but the United States and Britain put a hold on the request. The diplomats said Washington and London wanted clarifications as they were unaware of the visit in connection with the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie on December 21, 1988 in which 270 were killed. Bandar was to have travelled with an emissary from South African President Nelson Mandela. The two planned to deliver letters to Qaddafi on behalf of their respective governments.

#### Police officer suspended for smacking man

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian Interior Minister Habib Al Adli has suspended a police officer who punched and insulted a donkey-cart driver, police sources said on Wednesday. Captain Zakariya Essawi was riding in a shared taxi Monday in Mit Nama village north of Cairo when the incident occurred. The taxi brushed against the cart as it squeezed into a narrow alley, prompting the officer to blame the cart driver for the near-accident, insult him and hit him hard on the head, they said. The man was hospitalised for head injuries while villagers surrounded the officer to prevent him from leaving a senior district security official arrived.

#### Two in five French babies born out of wedlock

PARIS (R) — Two out of every five babies in France are now being born out of wedlock, compared to just six per cent of babies three decades ago, state statistical agency INSEE reported on Thursday. The upward trend in babies born outside marriage coincides with a steady decline in the marriage rate in France, INSEE said, noting that today, one in every six couples is unmarried. According to the new study, of the 29.6 million people living in couples in France, 24.8 million are married while 4.8 million are not. Of the 2.4 million unmarried couples, 1.1 million live with at least one child, INSEE said. "People no longer talk about 'illegitimate' or 'natural' children, but about children 'born out of marriage'," it added.

## Japanese FM to visit Saturday

(Continued from page 1)

Japan is an important donor to countries of the Middle East and especially to the Palestinian National Authority.

"We have already contributed \$400 million in aid to the Palestinians and over the next two years we will be able to offer another \$200 million," he was quoted as saying.

"Apart from Japan, I believe only the U.S. or the European Union nations together would be able to do something like that."

Koumura reportedly said his appeal would consist of asking Israel and the Palestinians to stick to procedures agreed in the Wye River land-for-security deal signed in the U.S. last October.

## Iraq claims victory in the skies

(Continued from page 1)

Meanwhile an Iraqi opposition leader warned that Saddam was planning terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which both allowed U.S. and British planes to use their facilities for the strikes.

"The Iraqi regime is preparing to attack Kuwait and Saudi Arabia because it is convinced its time is up," Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Al Hakim

told the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Rai Al Aam.

"Iraq is planning to carry out terrorist operations in the two countries through its agents there," said Hakim, leader of an Iran-based Shiite Muslim group, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

Russia also stepped into the fray on Wednesday, calling for a review of the no-fly zones.

"We will remind you that

the no-fly zones in the south and north of Iraq were established outside the framework of a U.N. Security Council resolution," Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin told reporters.

"Our negative attitude to this illegal action is well known," he added. "Sooner or later this question must be reviewed."

The no-fly zones, which cover Iraqi territory below the 33rd Parallel in the south and

above the 36th Parallel in the north, were imposed after the 1991 Gulf war.

Iraq's U.N. Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun said Wednesday he expected "the worst" after the latest clashes.

He also warned that Iraq could not guarantee the safety of British and American members of the U.N. humanitarian staff based in Iraq, following the U.N.'s refusal to bow to Baghdad's request to remove them.

"Iraq cannot be held responsible if anything happens to

those people because there are security risks involved here, given the bombing and the continuation of the British and American violation of our airspace."

"This could lead some people to act individually and somehow it could endanger the safety of those personnel," said Hamdoun, in an interview with the BBC.

Britain dismissed the Iraqi statement as "a wholly bogus argument from this particular repressive regime."

## Shahak launches election bid

(Continued from page 1)

The prime minister was forced into early elections after his coalition of right-wing and religious parties collapsed last month, in large part over the stalled peace process with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu now faces a host of challengers from the left and right, including several defectors from his own Likud party, in a race which Israeli analysts consider wide open.

Outlining his political ideas for the first time in public, Lipkin-Shahak said his priorities would be to seek reconciliation between Israel's rival political, ethnic and religious communities and to make peace with the country's Arab neighbours.

"We are a nation at war with itself, a domestic war that can lead to disaster if we don't stop it in time," he said.

Lipkin-Shahak, who was army chief of staff from January 1995 to July 1998, acknowledged his lack of political experience but denied it was a handicap.

"I am not a politician, but... I learned a lot participating in negotiations with the Palestinians and Syrians," he said.

"I have seen how serious mistakes were made," he said, referring to the deadlock which has gripped the peace process since Netanyahu came to power in May 1996.

"Today there is neither peace nor security," he said. "While focusing most of his

criticism at Netanyahu, Lipkin-Shahak also chided the opposition Labour Party which had unsuccessfully sought to woo him into its ranks, saying Labour "has failed to bring Israelis together."

Recent opinion polls show that Lipkin-Shahak is the best placed candidate to beat Netanyahu if the election for prime minister goes to a second-round run-off between the two.

But the same surveys show that the ex-general has little chance of reaching the second round against both Netanyahu and Labour Party leader Ehud Barak.

Both Barak and Netanyahu nevertheless fear the popular ex-general and agreed to hold off the new elections until May

17 in hopes the shine will wear off Lipkin-Shahak's candidacy. During the press conference, Lipkin-Shahak skirted a question about whether he supported the creation of an independent Palestinian state, a development fiercely opposed by Netanyahu.

"These issues will be discussed in the final status negotiations," he said, before adding that Palestinian National Authority leader Yasser Arafat "is already received abroad like a head of state."

But he quickly went on to counter Netanyahu charges that he would make dangerous concessions to Arafat and give up Israeli control over Arab east Jerusalem, which Palestinians hope to make the capital of a future state.

"There will be no concessions over the sovereignty of Jerusalem," he said.

Lipkin-Shahak did say he was willing to make territorial concessions on the annexed Golan Heights in order to achieve peace with Syria and Lebanon.

"I believe that there will be no peace in Lebanon without Syria and there will have to be a compromise on the Golan Heights," he said.

Lipkin-Shahak named no other members of his nascent, and as yet unnamed, party. But he expressed confidence he could forge an alliance with a powerful former member of Netanyahu's Likud party, Dan Meridor, who last month announced he would also create a centrist group and run for prime minister.

"It is obvious that there will not be two centrist candidates for prime minister, we have to decide between us" who will run, he said.

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